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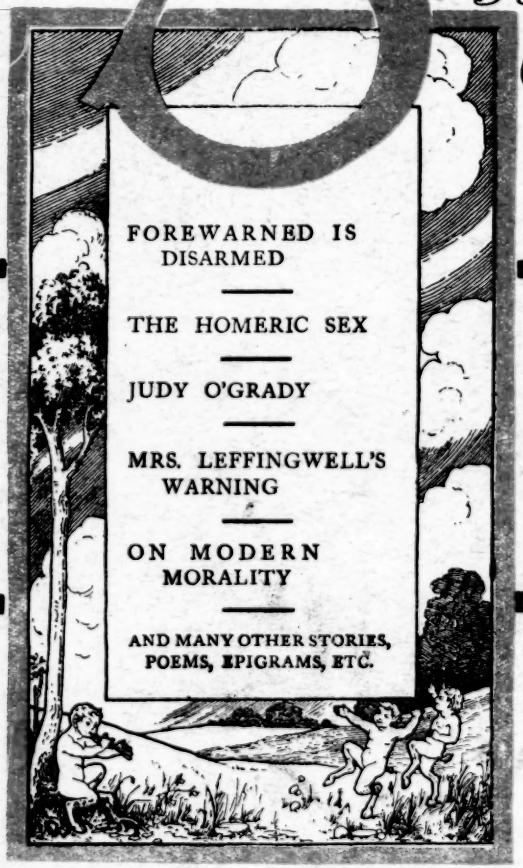
THE SMART SET

A Magazine of Cleverness

To Amuse, Not to Instruct



FOREWARNED IS DISARMED

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JUDY O'GRADY

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THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF CLEVERNESS

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Editor—J. W. MILNE

SEPTEMBER, 1918

FOREWARNED IS DISARMED	Charles Caldwell Dobie	1
ON MODERN MORALITY	Patrick Kearney	24
THE PLEASANT MADNESS OF THE FACULTY	Vincent Starrett	25
THE UNITED STATE	Dennison Varr	29
A NEW YORK SKETCH	Ludwig Lewisohn	29
ENNUI	Clark Ashton Smith	30
THE HOMERIC SEX	Owen Hatteras	31
PRAYER	Leslie Nelson Jennings	38
EXPLAIN THEM	Charles Glendon	38
THE LAST DAY	V. H. Friedlaender	39
CONSISTENCY	Thomas Effing	50
INFATUATION	Ben Hecht	51
INTERRUPTION	Anita Allen	56
MRS. LEFFINGWELL'S WARNING	William Hamilton Osborne	57
THE WEAVER OF WORDS	Amanda Benjamin Hall	73
PUNISHMENT	June Gibson	74
THE PRODIGAL	Louis Untermeyer	74
THE PERPLEXITY THAT CONFRONTED BELDEN	M. L. Meeker	75
JILL, DO YOU REMEMBER?	Harold Crawford Stearns	79
RECOMPENSE	John Hamilton	80
SOUTH WIND	Hortense Flexner	80
JUDY O'GRADY	Lilith Benda	81
THE CARRIER OF THE GREAT BARROW SOCIAL PLAGUE	Randolph Bartlett	91
ABOUT FASHIONS AND OTHER THINGS	Various Hands	98

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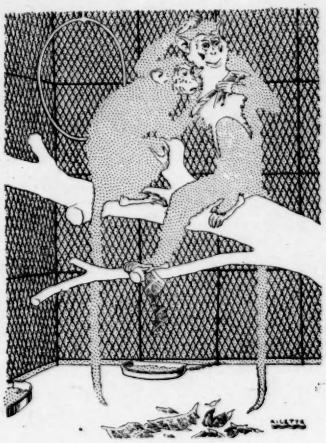
MRS. HANUMAN'S INDISCRETION.

A FABLE.

By H. DENNIS BRADLEY.

(The present ridiculous state of the law of libel must serve as an apology for the introduction of Biblical nomenclature.)



"Were We to Blame?"

One of the saddest features of the war is the horrified remorse and shame of the intellectuals amongst the monkeys.

In thoughtful simian circles it is recognized that something went gravely wrong somewhere in the process of evolution, and all sorts of reasons have been adduced, the most widely accepted being the notorious flightiness—and worse—of the First Monkey's spouse.

Thus even again we have the sad spectacle of the indiscretions of the mothers being visited on the billionth generation.

Eugenics is—or are—a wonderful study.

IT was in an evil moment for his peace of mind that Huppah, the Oldest Monkey in the Cage, slily abstracted a piece of newspaper from a passing small boy.

It was for its possible contents that the old gentleman annexed the sheet, he had no itch for news.

But contents there were none, and finding time hang upon his hands he commenced to read the paper with that easy-going tolerant contempt for the degenerate human which is so marked among the Monkey-World Intellectuals.

"Pho!" he remarked scornfully, "a nice mess our descendants have got themselves into! 'Grave Wool Shortage!' 'Black Outlook for the Future!' 'Possibility of No Clothes!' Serve them right, the bare, smooth-skin rascals. Precious ugly some of them will look to be sure." And he giggled to himself. "A nice sight that fat, bald-headed old human who tried to prod me with his stick this morning will make, with not a stitch or a hair to cover him, and not a spark of humour to warm him! 'No wool'; well, that doesn't affect us of the pure bred stock;" and he stroked his fur complacently.

Idly he commenced to tear the sheet into scraps of paper, and amused himself by watching them flutter to the floor of the Cage.

"'Meat Shortage.' Bah! 'Further Reduction of Spirits.' Pooh! 'Match Scarcity.' Pish! 'Possible Coal Famine. Tush! Civilisation? Gosh! . . . Paradise Lost!! Whatever *are* the idiots on the other side of the Cage doing?"

An item caught his eye that made him pause. "'Fight to the Last Man!'" he muttered, and became suddenly thoughtful. A worried look stole into his eyes and he called his aged wife, Jochebed, to his side.

"The Last Man," she repeated in amazement, when he had read the passage to her. "Huppah, what does it mean to *us?*"

"By the bones of Hanuman, Father of All the Monkeys," he growled, "it looks as though we shall have to begin all over again"—she gave a little squeak of flattered alarm—"but," he went on grimly, "let us at least take care the New Darwinian product is more intelligent than the last."

"But were we really to blame?"

"We were careless, my dear," he replied with immense decision.

"I have always thought Mrs. Hanuman rather flighty," she murmured, woman like.

"Something more than flighty I fear, judging by results," corrected the old gentleman. "Poor Hanuman, he had his hands full. I always pitied him—almost as much as I pitied the Tertium Quid. She led them both a pretty dance!"

Mrs. Jochebed turned savagely on her spouse.

"That's right," she snapped acidly, "blame the female, *of course!*"

Huppah scratched his head, and then raised his voice imperiously. "In any case," he commanded, "*should* it be necessary to start all over again, see to it that the laws of simian eugenics are properly respected. Make it your sole aim to avoid the evolution of a degenerate race liable to fits of Armageddon."

And Jochebed, his wife, became right thoughtful.

* * * * * *

Leaving the subject of Mrs. Hanuman's infidelity and its tragic consequences, if we fight to the last yarn of wool POPE & BRADLEY will of necessity be compelled to supply hair-producers. Meanwhile the wool shortage will grow less acute with the man shortage. Getting on with the war, the following prices are unghoulish. Lounge Suits from **£7 7s.**; Dinner Suits from **£10 10s.**; Service Jackets from **£5 15s. 6d.**; Riding Breeches from **£4 4s.**

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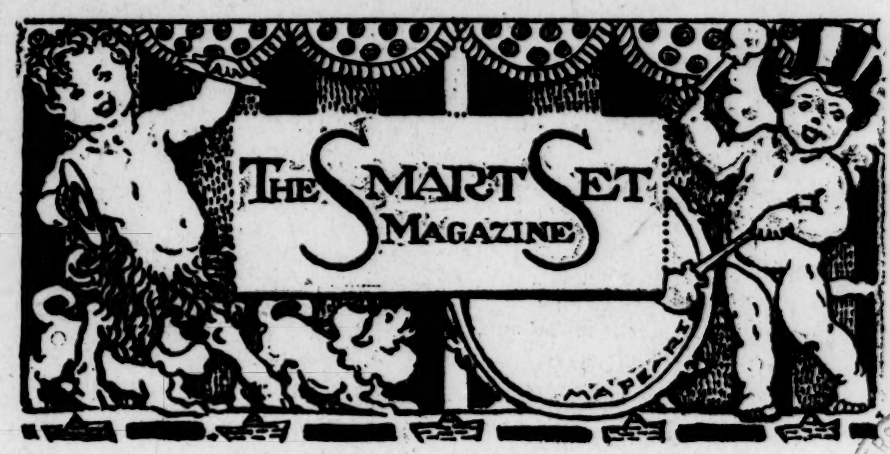

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FOREWARNED IS DISARMED

By Charles Caldwell Dobie

I

"DAFFODILS—*yellow* daffodils for Miss Merridew, sir? Oh, of course, sir! Just so, sir!"

The heavy bronze door of the Merridew Mansion closed slowly, blotting out the obsequious and gravely correct Hobbs. Foster Muridge wheeled about in annoyance and with measured solemnity began to descend the marble stairway.

"Daffodils—*yellow* daffodils for Miss Merridew, sir?" The echo of the butler's polite incredulity still lingered.

"What could the beggar mean?" muttered Muridge. "What colour did he expect them to be?"

And suddenly it struck him that Hobbs' sense of propriety had not been outraged by the fact that daffodils were necessarily yellow. No, Hobbs had been inexpressibly shocked to discover that Foster Muridge had committed the indiscretion of fancying that Miss Merridew would be pleased with anything so flamboyantly vulgar as a bouquet of yellow blooms.

Now that he pondered it in the cold light of retrospection, it seemed an impossible flight of fancy to imagine a bowl of yellow daffodils set among the pastel suavities of Clarice Merridew's boudoir. As a matter of fact, he should have chosen roses, pale pink roses, to match equally the faint bloom of his fiancée's cheeks, or the tempered colouring of her silk-screened windows. What had possessed him to sound a note so inexpressibly garish, he asked himself, as he stood, between the marble lions that flanked the stairway, and dreamily drew on his grey suede gloves.

Finding no answer to his question, his flickering annoyance died completely. It was impossible to be ruffled by trifles on such a full-blown Spring day. Indeed, he forgot to feel the slightest disappointment over the fact that Clarice had either ignored or forgotten their appointment for tea. *Tea!* Fancy drinking tea and going through all the boring formalities of a stuffy drawing-room on such a red-lipped April afternoon! This was a day for the open road, the blue sky overhead, the soft thunder of birds in flight. . . . Oh, if the thrall of the city still lay upon

one, it was a day for flashing crowds and the music of the band swinging up paved streets, the rattle and honk of yellow taxis darting like wasps in the limpid sunlight, wisps of subtle perfumes escaping from webs of finely spun linen masquerading as handkerchiefs, lips, full and coloured by design where nature failed, in short a day for pretence, passion—adventure—adventure as sun-soaked and palpitant as the very daffodils that blossomed in every flower-vendor's stall.

"Daffodils—*yellow* daffodils for Miss Merridew, sir?" Already he had the explanation. They were the expression of his flaming mood, and if the memory of Clarice grew pallid by contrast the lack was hers.

He was recalled by a voice at his elbow. He looked down. A lean, dashing, swarthy gentleman stood a few steps beneath him, answering the questioning lift of his eyebrows with a sweeping bow.

"Ah, if you will be so good! I am a stranger in San Francisco and the address . . ."

Muridge took the envelope which the stranger held up to him.

The man before him was a rogue, artful, insidious, delightful, but still a rogue. The point of his waxed mustachios proclaimed it, the rakish tilt of his slouch hat echoed it, but it was his tie, spilling over the black surface of a sober waistcoat that set the seal of confirmation, a flowing, insolent, abandoned yellow tie!

Foster Muridge looked down at the address on the envelope. *Miss Clarice Merridew!*

For a moment he was astounded!

It did not seem possible that Clarice could be the recipient of a note from the hands of such an arrantly fascinating knave. If such a thing were possible, what became of the faintly tinted theories which he had been evolving? And to add to his surprise, he noted swiftly the heavy gold crest which ornamented the left-hand corner of the scented missive. Obviously this coat-of-arms was quite too opulent and distinctive to spell anything but social distinction. There was something old-world and baronial and exclusive about it.

"Oh, yes!" he found himself stammering. "Just so! Miss Merridew lives here. If you will allow me I shall see that it is delivered!"

An ugly light gleamed in the stranger's eye.

"Señor, it is not possible! It is for me to deliver."

Foster Muridge stiffened with cool displeasure.

"I shall see that Miss Merridew gets this letter," he answered with irritating finality.

The man before him breathed audibly. "Give it to me—back!" he warned.

Muridge shrugged, eyeing the yellow tie calmly as he slipped the envelope into his pocket. A quick movement on the part of the man before him revealed a knife-blade, but it was sheathed as instantly; only the flash of its owner's cruel smile still warned. But this sinister by-play merely confirmed Muridge in his determination to deliver the letter to Clarice Merridew himself. He was masculine enough to welcome persuasion, but he could not meet compulsion with a smiling countenance.

The swarthy stranger bowed again, this time with insolent exaggeration.

"Whom," he sneered, "have I the honour of . . ."

"Permit me—my card!" returned Muridge with assumed hauteur.

At this moment Muridge's car swung from the opposite corner toward the curb, and Muridge brushed the swarthy messenger from his path and moved forward. A prolonged howl arose, and Muridge was conscious of a futile tug at his coat. He turned. In a flash he saw a nimble hand moving in the direction of the sheathed stiletto. Muridge thrust out his fist and sent his antagonist staggering. Then, with quick decision, he faced about, gained the open door of his touring-car, hopped lightly in and was whirled away.

He looked back. The disconsolate

messenger was standing in the centre of the street, his hands lifted in mingled appeal and raillery toward heaven. At this distance only the insistent yellow of his tie pricked the blur of vanishing details. Moved from his habitual calm by the pulse-stirring moments that had just passed, Muridge waved an insolent farewell. Then, his spirits flickering down in sudden and inevitable reaction, he sank back in his seat and wondered what it had all been about.

What had urged him to the impertinence of calmly appropriating a note that was not addressed to him? Certainly he had no justification beyond the fact that he was the prospective husband of the lady for whom the letter was intended. And this was slight justification, indeed. No, there was no more excuse for his conduct than there had been for presenting himself at the conservative door of the Merridew mansion with a garish bouquet of yellow flowers. There was no explanation—it was something in the air, a subtle urge of Spring, a leaping-up of banked fires, a sudden desire to dance to the tune of Adventure. The stage had been set with blue skies and heavy perfumes and flaming April blossoms, and now, tripping from the wings, had come a delightful rogue, in sombre waistcoat and sun-splashed cravat, a crested note in one pocket and a sharpened stiletto in the other. Crested notes, under such circumstances, Muridge told himself, were made to be snatched from the fingers of such provocative messengers. But, having acted out the prologue, he could find no stage directions for the ensuing acts.

He turned his attention to the note he had so impulsively carried away. The elaborate coat-of-arms seemed now rather too familiar to harbour the mystery which he had been hoping for. Where had he seen it before? Almost instantly he remembered. He had noticed it upon the announcements scattered about town of an entertainment which was to take place that evening at the Palace Hotel for the benefit of the Red Cross. A certain Countess Orosi was to be the chief attraction—it appeared that she sang or committed some such folly in the name of charity. Apparently, the coat-of-arms was that of the Countess Orosi and had been used on the announcements as a lure for lovers of titles, as well as the curious.

Muridge had heard of this Countess Orosi. Her appearance upon the social horizon of San Francisco had been very recent, but armed with so effective a weapon as a coat-of-arms she had succeeded in rushing the most exclusive trenches. But over sundry whiskies and soda at various masculine foregatherings Muridge had also remarked the eye-lifting tone that accompanied any reference to this recent social recruit. Really, after everything was said and done, the Countess might be a very fascinating creature, she very probably was, but she was not precisely the sort of companion that one would pick out for one's fiancée. And her choice of messenger was not reassuring. He had no idea what the Countess Orosi had written to Clarice Merridew, he had no wish to know, but of one thing he was positive, he did not approve of the friendship and he would tell Clarice so at the first opportunity.

At this point, he remembered that he had heard also that the Countess Orosi had a brother—a Marquis of Something-or-other. It didn't matter about the title, but the thought of a fortune-hunting Marquis was not a calming interlude in Muridge's growing annoyance. What if this letter to Clarice were written by the Marquis himself and not by his sister?

Muridge looked at the handwriting on the envelope. It was bold and flowing and rather hard to place, a hand that might have belonged to either sex. He gave up in mingled despair and irritation. He didn't approve of either the Countess Orosi, or her titled brother, or Clarice Merridew, or even himself.

Suddenly everybody and everything grew tiresome and possession of the note irked him beyond measure. He couldn't read it, he couldn't deliver it

to Clarice without a ridiculous explanation, he couldn't fling it in the face of either the Countess or the Marquis as he would have liked—in short, he was in an absurd predicament, and he resented the whole irrational business.

But suddenly a warm breeze from the south curled about him with an insinuating caress. The flare of Spring seized upon him again. He had been longing all day for a dash of adventure in the unseasoned stew of his well-ordered existence, and if a snatched note and a swaggering messenger flavoured the dullness only slightly, at least they did their best. And it struck him that the Countess Orosi must be a really very interesting personality! Particularly if she measured up in even a small degree to her swarthy servitor.

Well, there was nothing to prevent him from making her acquaintance. To-night's concert was open to anybody with a dollar on his person, and he had a notion that the name of Foster Muridge would be equally potent in gaining admittance to the lady's inclusive circle. Of course, he could wait for an introduction, but why delay? Introductions were cold and pallid means to equally colourless ends—they suggested the severely correct Clarice, and her severely correct boudoir, in which yellow daffodils found no welcome.

If the note belonged to the Countess Orosi he would return it with as sweeping an apology as he could muster. But if he discovered that the Marquis had written it . . . Well, that was another matter. After all, Clarice Merridew was his fiancée, and he had some rights, even if he were a mere man, and an American man, at that. Of course, Clarice Merridew's fortune meant nothing to *him*, and yet . . .

"At least," he muttered, "I shan't let any foreign talent walk away with it!"

And, having thus established a rational reason for his interest in both the lady and her brother, he went on calmly piling up a series of irrational plans for accomplishing a thoroughly irrational purpose.

II

LURED by the Countess Orosi's coat-of-arms and the formidable list of patrons, a capacity crowd filled the Rose Room of the Palace Hotel and even spilled out into the lobby. In the hope that most of the concert would be over, Muridge waited until nine-thirty before making his appearance, but as is usual with such affairs, something had caused a delay and he found the first number responding frantically to the applause of an audience bent on getting its money's worth.

He had intended pushing forward to a good vantage-point where he could get an intimate view of the Countess in action, when, to his dismay, whom should he see sitting in one of the improvised boxes but Clarice and her mother. Then, like a dash of cold water, the realization swept him that Mrs. Merridew was one of the distinguished patrons of the entertainment in progress. He felt in his pocket for the note that he had come into such forcible possession of. All the possibilities back of his rather hectic and highly keyed afternoon fell in as quickly as a badly mixed cake. The Countess Orosi's note, no doubt, had to do with this ridiculous and commonplace concert. This explanation took the edge off all his subtle anticipations. Suddenly he lost all interest in the adventure, and looking sharply in the direction of his fiancée's languidly tilted head he felt stirred by a vague rancour. It was just like the Merridews to suck the orange of adventure dry of every possibility! No one could possibly imagine the stolid respectability of his prospective mother-in-law yielding up anything but trivial conventions. And Clarice? Well, youth itself was always full of flaring possibilities, but . . . No, he was quite sure that given the requisite number of years Clarice would repeat with monotonous fidelity all her mother's double-chinned virtues.

He had all but decided to slip out unnoticed and go home, when the memory of the Countess' swarthy servitor

pricked his depression like a pocket flashlight. Even the disappearing waistline of an unimaginative dowager and the honeyed smile of her calmly contented daughter could not quite efface the picture of the cavalier rogue whom the Countess Orosi chose as her messenger. He decided to chance further disillusionment, and, falling back in an obscure corner by the door, he stood with folded arms for a glimpse of the Countess Orosi.

The concert was interminable and the audience not to be denied. Encore followed encore. Finally at eleven o'clock a stir among the auditors heralded the number that all had been waiting for, and the Countess Orosi swept upon the platform followed by her accompanist.

Her effect upon the audience was instantaneous. Even the undiscriminating could not escape her personality. It was not her looks, or what she sang, or the quality of her voice that made the impression. But she did things differently; she had poise, understanding, a sense of humour. She sang very simple songs in French and in German. She sang even in English, which was surprising for an amateur. She "put over" her efforts completely, without acrobatics either physical or vocal, and left the platform with her audience clamouring for an encore, which she had the wit to deny.

Muridge escaped on the crest of a little wave of departing auditors, and stationed himself in the lobby at a point that he felt sure the Countess would pass. She came out almost instantly, quite alone, muffling a flaming red cloak tightly about her neck. At a little distance behind, an attendant, carrying a basket of roses, trotted obsequiously.

Muridge, crossing over, halted her. She looked up at him with a certain incurious boldness, which told him that she was accustomed to being taken by surprise.

"I am Foster Muridge," he said abruptly.

Her quick smile and the gloved hand she offered indicated that she knew his name and the social prestige behind it.

"I have just come from the concert," he was beginning again.

She checked him with a charming grimace. "Wasn't it dreadful? Every time I sing for charity I get my reward. And it's about as flat and unprofitable as virtue's. Please don't compliment me."

Muridge smiled. "I had no such intention. But mayn't I . . ."

"See me to my taxi? . . . I shall be charmed."

He relieved the page of the basket of flowers and followed the Countess through the revolving door to the sidewalk. Already the liveried factotum had scampered before their approach, and Muridge's car swung quickly forward, putting to rout the belated taxi which had answered the Countess' call.

"You may see me home also," she said with a sudden droop of eyes looking sidewise under their curling lashes.

He moved nearer. Her manner was at once candid and illusive, full of the subtle half-tones of sophistication. And for a moment the sparkle of her personality mounted to his senses like heady wine.

"Now—how did you guess what I had been hoping for?" he found himself whispering with an air of languishing melodrama, as he dismissed the taxi-cab with a curt wave of the hand and swung open the door of his car.

She hesitated as she gathered up her skirts, putting a discreetly revealed foot forward. "How did I guess? Do you imagine I am stupid enough to fancy that you were interested in my singing? And if you merely wished to make my acquaintance no less than twenty people could have given you an introduction. Remember I am at least five years older than I look, which means—"

"That you are still young enough to take a risk."

She looked back at him mockingly. "Women always bear a reputation for safe plays," she laughed.

He bowed her in. He was glad now that he had foresworn a conventional meeting. She had set the music at a

sharp pace and Muridge was still keyed to the lure of lively measures, but already he felt a fleeting conviction that she possessed the faculty of playing a tune that one might have difficulty in keeping time to.

III

"And now, Mr. Muridge," began the Countess, as the car speeded up, "will you be good enough to give me back the note you snatched from my man, Ruiz, this morning?"

Muridge, having looked for a display of conversational fencing, at least a languishing moment or two, was rushed off his feet by this direct attack. He dumbly fumbled in his pocket and handed the note to her.

"Thanks," she said drily. And she tore the letter into fragments and flung it to the breeze. "Now, that's off our minds."

"*Our* minds?" he echoed with questioning emphasis.

"You forget—I have a brother, the Marquis, you know. Somehow we never feel safe with incriminating scrawls floating about. Isn't that your experience, my *dear* Mr. Muridge?"

He knew that she was laughing at him, but he was too annoyed to join the merriment. Her cryptic banter almost confirmed the nasty suspicion that the Marquis had written the letter after all. How many such perfumed and crested notes did the demure Clarice Merridew have in her possession, he found himself demanding? And he had fancied her so wanly conventional, so fastidiously dull!

"You have not yet answered me," the Countess said with the shade of a drawl in her voice and she leaned back in her seat, touching him ever so slightly with an insinuating shoulder.

"I never write incriminating things," he answered stiffly.

"American men never have time to. They are too busy perpetrating them."

"Your man Ruiz is not an American," he retorted significantly.

"No, he's delightfully lacking in judgment. But you must grant that he *is* picturesque."

"Yes, almost too much so. Indeed, I should think you would find him a bit too temperamental for comfort."

She arranged the folds of her cloak. "Ruiz is the only thing that stands between me and complete ennui. San Francisco is *too* easy. If I didn't have him about I'd feel as if I were robbing the blind. When I get bored I send him out to stir up some excitement."

Muridge stared at her as she continued to smooth the velvet folds of her cloak. She was growing more and more audacious and charming, and he was growing less and less sure of her.

"I take it that you were bored this afternoon, then," he ventured.

"Wasn't I! The Marquis is getting so hopelessly Americanized. Everything reduced to a system. He's had a vertical filing cabinet installed, and a card index, for cataloguing all our prospective victims. It's too prosaic to last. I don't approve of business methods applied to our profession. One might just as well earn one's way in the stock market and steal in respectable fashion from the rich but dishonest widows and orphans."

Muridge shifted his hat from one knee to another. "And just what did you say your profession is?"

She closed her eyes half way, looking at him with coquettish insolence. "I didn't say. I didn't think I had to. But then I forgot. You are a man, and probably can't get anything but correct answers to your sums. My profession is a good deal like yours, Mr. Muridge, I live on the labours of others. The only difference between us is that I have to use my wits to accomplish it, while you were relieved of that necessity by your grandfather."

He flushed. "Indeed, how interesting! And pray, how do you know that I was relieved of using my wits by my grandfather?"

"Well, Mr. Muridge, granting you have any, the whole history of your grandfather's attempt to deprive you of their use may be found in the Marquis'

systematic arrangement of '*Who Might Be in San Francisco.*' The Marquis is a wonder at gathering data, but, of course, there are some things that elude him . . . your wits, for instance. But I think I can complete the record on my return home."

"I fear it will not add greatly to the chronicle," Muridge returned with a feeble attempt at sarcasm.

She allowed the conversation to lapse, and she sat back easily, her hands folded in her lap as she looked serenely out of the window. Her face was turned slightly away, and he took this opportunity to study the profile, especially the piquant tilt to her nose, quite at odds with the Madonna-like arrangement of her dark hair.

His musings were halted by the abrupt stopping of the machine. The chauffeur scrambled down and opened the door.

The Countess Orosi stirred languidly and gave a stifled yawn, as she said to Muridge:

"Well, we've arrived."

Muridge clambered out, and gave the Countess his hand.

"Do come in and meet the Marquis. He will be delighted," she insisted, slipping her arm into his.

A moment before he had almost persuaded himself that he was quite through with an impertinent incident that only the glamour of a perfect Spring day could gild with adventuresome promise. But now, with the hand of the Countess Orosi resting placidly in the crook of his elbow and her hair shaking out little ripples of intriguing perfume, he came to a very different decision.

* * * * *

As they climbed the long flight of marble steps, he wondered how the Countess had contrived to obtain the Pollard mansion for her sojourn in San Francisco. The Countess, divining his mental question, answered it with uncanny promptness.

"Wasn't I lucky to fall into this?" she queried, sweeping her hand in the direction of the house. "I met May Pollard three years ago when the Marquis and I were travelling from Cairo to Brindisi. We were on the same steamer. She had a very valuable sapphire brooch, a gift from her husband when they were married. Just after she landed in Brindisi she discovered that it had been stolen. The Marquis and I stayed with her all of one day, helping her report the matter to the police. She was so grateful—you can't imagine! And the very first person to look us up when we arrived in San Francisco was May. 'Now, you dear things,' she insisted, 'there isn't the slightest need of your being cooped up in a stuffy hotel. I'm leaving for Japan next week, and the house is yours.' And so it was settled."

An unpleasant suspicion flashed across Muridge. "And the brooch? Was it recovered?"

The Countess halted their slow ascent, turning to him with a frank laugh. "What a question! Remember, Mr. Muridge, sapphires are my special weakness."

He was too baffled to be displeased, but he matched her insouciance. "So glad you told me," he drawled, covering his necktie with an instinctive hand. "I have a valuable sapphire pin myself."

"Yes, I have been looking at it for the past fifteen minutes. You see, the Marquis has that indexed."

She stooped over to disentangle her skirt from an incredibly high heel.

"Well," he was beginning tritely, "forewarned—"

"Is *disarmed*," she finished. "That's my motto."

IV

THE stately elegance of the Pollard mansion suggested the usual attendant at the door—calm, dignified, unruffled. But Muridge was not in the least surprised to find the swarthy messenger of the afternoon, Ruiz, doing the honours. The rogue smiled inscrutably upon them both, facing Muridge with a glint

of ironic humour in his eye as he relieved the Countess of her cloak.

"Let us go upstairs," said the Countess. "The Marquis has some very good cigars in his workshop. It's the only room in the house that isn't fussy. If I had this house for a year I'd do it over."

Muridge followed.

They found the Marquis, a slim, rather blonde, engaging gentleman, bending over a centre-table as they entered the room. The lights were too soft to give Muridge more than an indistinct impression of the surroundings, but the litter on the table was unscreened and Muridge caught the twinkling of unset jewels and the flash of gold and silver scraps. The Marquis looked up quickly and let a string of pearls fall carelessly upon the heap of nondescript gems. The Marquis did not attempt to do any of the formal things demanded by the situation. He merely answered the Countess' introduction with a rather patronizing nod as he said:

"My dear Muridge, I'm so glad you ran in. That impossible Ruiz gave you such a character that I'm relieved to find you an ordinary human being."

Muridge was beginning to relish this flippant pair. "If his descriptions are as vivid as his personality, only a superman could hope to measure up to the standard," he replied.

"Come, Carlos," said the Countess briskly, as she drew up three easy chairs about a massive table, "find Mr. Muridge some cigars. I only lured him up here on the promise of a decent smoke. And, remember, both of you, I shan't allow Ruiz to be maligned."

"His personality relieves *us* of that necessity," replied the Marquis, tossing a box of cigars on the table. "Did the Countess tell you, Muridge, where she picked up this last curiosity of hers?"

"I don't think Mr. Muridge is at all interested," the Countess said decisively, as she waved Muridge to a seat.

Muridge sank into the chair and reached for a cigar. "I'm more than interested, I'm consumed with curiosity."

The Countess extracted a cigarette from her gold case. The Marquis struck a match and held it out to her. She took the proffered light.

"We ran across him in Mexico, two years ago," the Countess began. "He was sitting sprawled out in the sun, against the wall of a crumbling mud-house in one of the by-ways of the City of Mexico. It was an insufferably hot day. I remember it distinctly. I had trotted out in the glare to take a photo of some church. Or was it a shrine, Carlos?"

"It was neither," answered the Marquis as he seated himself opposite Muridge. "You wanted a picture of that handsome scoundrel who had taken it into his head to serenade you only the night before."

"There now, you've spoiled it all!" cried the Countess petulantly. "I wanted to give a dim, religious tone to the narrative."

"Then," retorted the Marquis, "you should have picked out something more convincing than a glaring hot sun and Manuel Riccardo de los Vegas Ruiz."

"Anyway," the Countess went on, "my handsome serenader was to be shot at sunrise. That is, *he was to have been shot* at sunrise, but of course you know how slow they are in Mexico, so it was eleven o'clock when I arrived on the scene with my camera. My admirer of the previous night was still standing with his face to the wall. I don't know why he was being shot. Nobody knew. I guess he miscalculated on the time scheduled for the next revolution and got caught on the wrong side of the fence."

She halted her narrative long enough to puff daintily at her cigarette, and continued:

"There he stood with his face to the wall. His hands were tied behind him and there didn't seem to be anyone about who cared whether he was shot or not. So I went up to Ruiz and kicked him. Yes, positively, I kicked him. One has to, you know, or one would never rouse anybody. 'Come!' I said to him, in my worst Spanish,

'why does not somebody shoot this man and have done with it?' Ruiz rose and bowed charmingly. 'What! In this heat? Would you make draught animals of us, Señora? But, then, if the Señora wishes—' And he gave a shrug that was more expressive than fifty oaths. 'What have my wishes to do with the matter?' I demanded. 'Everything, Señora,' he replied with the utmost gallantry. And, with that, he whipped out a gun and the thing was done."

"How shocking!" burst out Muridge.

"Not at all," replied the Countess calmly. "Not nearly as shocking as standing from sunrise until noon, with your face to the wall, waiting for someone to come along and shoot you. I could tell you a dozen more shocking tales than this, but I won't."

"She came back to the hotel," interrupted the Marquis, "with this gentleman bandit trailing after her. I could not persuade either one of them that they were not stark, staring mad. This is just the kind of a rogue I've been dreaming about, and he won't be nearly as much trouble as my Japanese poodle," insisted the Countess. And Ruiz replied alike to my entreaties and threats: 'I am the Señora's slave.'"

The Countess threw Muridge a languorous glance. "You should have seen Ruiz this afternoon when he arrived home from his encounter with you," she went on. "He was so enraged he stuttered. 'Señora,' he yelled, 'a pig of an American has undone me!—a gentleman, if you please, or so they call these luckless sons of perdition in this country! See, here is his card . . . He has taken away the Señora's letter, and struck me, Manuel Riccardo de los Vegas Ruiz, with his fist! With his fist. See, I spit at his memory!'"

"He spat at your memory three times and called upon all the saints to witness the performance," said the Marquis. "Only the Countess succeeded in quieting him. 'Come,' she said, 'leave off this appeal to heaven. The saints have weightier matters on their hands. This pig of an American is a gentleman, and if he does not deliver the note he will return it unopened.'"

The Countess smiled upon Muridge's look of gratification. "Even Carlos refused to believe that you would do what I had said. 'How will he know where to return the note if he does not read it?' he objected. To which I replied: 'You forget the Orosi crest on the envelope.' And I wagered a pair of gloves against a box of cigars."

"And I suppose I lost," muttered the Marquis gloomily.

"Decidedly. I was so sure that I ordered my gloves beforehand." Muridge looked at his watch.

"Don't tell me you're going!" she protested. "Why, you haven't seen the Marquis' card-index system yet. Come, Carlos, don't sit there pouting just because you lost a wager. Show Mr. Muridge how clever you can be under pressure."

The Marquis rose and shook himself with the air of a collie roused from a warm hearth by his master's prod.

"What does Muridge know about my card-index system, I should like to know?" he muttered sulkily.

"Why, I told him, of course. Do you suppose a woman misses a chance to brag about the accomplishments of the male members of her family? Indeed not! They're far too few."

"Now, I say, Muridge," sputtered the Marquis, "do you think this quite—well, quite *discreet* of the Countess? Why should we take you into our confidence? I daresay you're a good enough sort, but I must say your conduct of to-day was disturbing, to say the least. Snatching letters not intended for you is bad manners—distinctly bad manners."

"The Countess is merely living up to her motto, I take it," replied Muridge drily.

"Precisely," she nodded. "I always say: An honest confession is good for another indiscretion. And a little knowledge, you know, Carlos, is a dangerous thing."

"Or as the Countess says," quoted Muridge glibly, "forewarned is disarmed."

The Marquis gave grudging assent to their flippancies as he led the way to the vertical filing-case. It stood in an extreme corner of the room and, before it, was a low table littered with memoranda.

"Now," commanded the Countess, "give your curiosity scope. Mention any name and get a complete account of its past, present and future."

Muridge reflected. "Well, how about my own?"

"That's not curiosity, that's conceit," sniffed the Countess. "Carlos, if we must, we must. Turn up Foster Muridge."

The Marquis consulted his card-index, and, acting on the reference, drew a pocket from the vertical file and read off the following:

Muridge, Foster Dillingham.
Parents—Respectable, but unimportant.
Source of Income—Two million dollar estate left by maternal grandfather.
Grandfather's Source—Shrewd business head and plenty of salt in a mine.
Social Position—Never fails to receive an invitation to the leading champagne agents' dinners.
Hobbies—Polo and amateur detective work.

"That last," explained the Countess, "was added late this afternoon."

"Is that all!" cried Muridge with evident disappointment. "I thought you said he had my sapphire pin listed."

"There's a cross reference for that," explained the Marquis. "We've got to look up Mrs. Martha Dillingham Kenwood for that information."

"My aunt!" exclaimed Muridge.

"If you object—" began the Countess.

"What would be the use?" snapped Muridge.

"Kenwood," announced the Marquis, "Martha Dillingham."
Husband—Dead, but provident. (He was the manufacturer of Pollyana's Piquant Pickles.)
Income—Not dazzling, but steady. Pollyana has been crowded a bit by the Fifty-seven Varieties.
Chief Item of Interest—A fifty thousand dollar sapphire necklace, said to have been presented by the Emperor to Josephine. (Note: Necklaces of this class are as common in America as Mayflower furniture.)
Remarks—Necklace is said to be complete with the exception of pendant, which was reset as a scarf pin for Mrs. Kenwood's nephew, Foster Dillingham Muridge, on the occasion of his twenty-first birthday.
Further Remarks—Mrs. Kenwood is reputed to give interesting dinner parties and to have a good cook. She does not confine herself to guests of society, but goes in for brains occasionally.
Vulnerable Points—Likes to be referred to as an authority on Japanese prints and considers it a compliment to have any one discuss the new spirit in modern fiction with her.

"You seem to have given a lot of attention to Mrs. Kenwood," remarked Muridge, a note of displeasure sharpening his voice.

The Marquis nodded. "Ladies of uncertain age always merit a lot of attention. They usually possess jewels, social information, and good cooks."

"Yes," assented the Countess charmingly, "we've given a lot of attention to Mrs. Kenwood, but so far she doesn't seem to have noticed our existence. Is it true? Does she go in for brains occasionally? Because I was thinking—you see, she's giving a dinner party next week. I heard all about it yesterday. Now that you've met us and discovered how open and above-board we really are, do you fancy it would be impossible to have us included in the festivities?"

"Well . . ." Muridge began to stammer.

The Countess waved him to silence. "Of course," she said with an injured air, "if you don't care to arrange it, why let's say no more about it. But really, Mr. Muridge, I did think *you* would appreciate our frankness. Perhaps you're displeased at the reference to the salted mine and Pollyana's Piquant Pickles. But then, you know, the Marquis must have his little joke, even in a vertical-file. Maybe you fear for that sapphire pin of yours. Candidly I should think you'd be glad to get rid of it!"

Muridge looked down at the sapphire pin. He hated jewellery in general, and this scarf-pin in particular. It was quite too massive and flashing and vulgar, and he only wore it occasionally as a tribute to the ill-advised generosity of his aunt. It surprised him to find the Countess so swift in her intuitions, and her mocking air challenged every dormant indiscretion within him.

"As a matter of fact I would," he retorted, matching her bantering tone, as he drew the pin from his cravat and held it out to her. "Allow me to add another sapphire to your collection!"

The Countess drew back with a gesture of refusal. "My dear Mr. Muridge, what can you think of us? Don't you suppose that we have some standards—the Marquis and I? Did you fancy that I would be unprofessional enough to accept such a favour at your hands?"

"My sister is right," interposed the Marquis. "It is our policy never to accept anything open to our skill."

Muridge stared in speechless admiration at such audacity and calmly returned the pin to its place. The Countess lifted her eyes to him in limpid appeal.

"What about the dinner party?" she urged gently.

Muridge had never seen anyone capable of such swift and charming transitions and as the Countess stood languishing before him he thought of Clarice Merridew. Clarice was sweet and uncoloured and lovely, he could not gainsay that, but there were times . . . a Spring day, for instance. . . . Yes, there was a time for everything, a time for yellow daffodils, and a time for faintly pink rosebuds, a time for vivid sophistication and a time for naive innocence, a time to be cautious and a time to be recklessly indiscreet. After all, the prospect of this pair at his aunt's dinner-table was too diverting to be denied.

"I'll do my best to secure the invitation," he returned airily. "But on one condition. You mustn't go in for the necklace. That really is my aunt's complete background. You'd rob her of her setting if you took that."

"We never accept conditions of any sort," replied the Marquis. "It's unprofessional."

"And, besides," broke in the Countess, inclining gently toward Muridge, "you wouldn't want us to think that you were afraid of us."

Muridge broke into a hearty laugh. "Afraid, my dear Countess? I should say not! Why, I'll telephone right now if you wish."

"That's more like it!" cried the Marquis. "The Countess and I like our opponents to take a sporting chance."

"The telephone is right over there," the Countess said quickly, as she led Muridge to the jewel-strewn centre-table.

Muridge had a flickering hope that his aunt would be out. But it proved otherwise. She was at home and in a complacent mood, and before he quite realized it the Countess Orosi and her brother had been included in the list of guests for the distinguished dinner party.

He rose from the telephone. The Countess was smiling widely up at him.

"Really, I must be going!" he announced decisively. "Your formal invitation will follow in to-morrow's mail."

The Marquis came forward with Muridge's hat. The Countess gave her guest a pliant hand.

"So glad," she purred at him, "that you decided to present yourself without a stupid introduction. Really, informality is the soul of adventure. And I shall look forward to meeting your aunt. Any woman who can be romantic over a necklace in the face of those piquant pickles must be a dear!"

He reached toward the Marquis for his hat, but at that moment the sudden appearance of Ruiz made all three start instinctively. The debonair rogue had lost all his aggressive nonchalance. His face was pale. He began to stutter.

"Countess! Marquis!" he hissed in a frightened whisper. "The police—they are downstairs!"

V

"THE police—they are downstairs!"

The echo of Ruiz's startling words brought Muridge up with a round turn. A moment before he had been enjoying the effrontery of the two self-confessed criminals standing before him, now he felt a shivering sense of guilt in having allowed himself to be entertained out of all caution by their impudent swaggering.

"The police? Impossible!" cried the Countess. She flashed a running look of inquiry at the three men, resting her swift glance upon the Marquis.

He shrugged. And with a languid gesture swept the heap of jewels from the table into Muridge's hat.

This precaution on the Marquis' part came not an instant too soon, for the next moment the bulky presence of two policemen shadowed the threshold.

"Madame," said the stouter of the two, bowing to the Countess, "we have an unpleasant duty to perform. We have a search warrant for a string of pearls worn by a lady named Cortez."

The Countess seemed to rally at once under the force of the blow. She presented a smiling countenance to the pair as she returned boldly:

"Pearls? How ridiculous! I loathe them!"

Muridge continued to stare with hopeless fascination at the Marquis, who calmly transferred the jewel-filled hat to his other hand.

"Mr. Muridge," the Countess began easily, turning a rueful face in his direction, "don't let this annoying affair detain you. We are quite safe in the hands of these gentlemen."

The men blushed with evident pleasure. Muridge felt that the Countess had scored. He murmured a conventional protest and moved toward the door. The policemen stood aside to let him pass. It was the voice of the Marquis that caused him to halt.

"I say, Muridge, are you going without your hat?"

He stared and retraced his steps. The Marquis was holding the hat on a level with its owner's broad shoulders. Muridge gingerly received his loot-filled head covering. For a moment he stood motionless, fascinated by the Marquis' audacity. He had an impulse to fling the contents of his hat in the face of this debonair thief. But at that moment the Countess stepped forward and she gave him two slender fingers with an air of regretful dismissal as she said:

"I almost forgot. Would it be possible to include Mr. Ruiz in the invitation for dinner at your aunt's on Thursday? You see, the Marquis has a midnight engagement and I have no one to see me home. If you will be so good. . . . Thank your aunt in my name. Good-night. We will see you on Thursday then."

Muridge shadowed his hat with his arm and left without another word. As he gained the head of the stairs he heard the voice of the stout policeman:

"We will search the private safe first, Madame."

He looked down into his hat. The jewels were glimmering insolently up at him even in the cautious light of the hallway, and on the top of these gaudy baubles a string of chaste pearls lay coiled like a white snake.

* * * * *

Muridge's chauffeur heard him coming down the long flight of marble steps, and stood with one hand upon the door of the car waiting for orders. Muridge hardly knew what to do. Should he climb into the machine and whirl homeward or dismiss the man and walk? His indecision was routed by a voice almost at his ear. He turned and faced Ruiz.

"If you have no objection, Mr. Muridge, I shall ride a few blocks with you," the swarthy rogue said with a malicious smile. "One is always safer at a distance from the police."

Muridge shrugged and let Ruiz precede him. "He means to relieve me of the jewels!" flashed through Muridge's mind.

The chauffeur slammed the door and

waited for orders; a puzzled expression showed on his face.

"To the Cliff House!" ordered Muridge sharply.

The man touched his hat and swung to his place at the wheel.

"The Cliff House?" echoed Ruiz. "Capital!" His voice dropped to a whisper. "But, my good sir, be very careful of the jewels—be very careful."

Muridge could scarcely restrain himself from shoving Ruiz into the street. But there was a venomous air of assurance about the Mexican that warned Muridge to proceed cautiously. Without replying, he transferred the jewels to the capacious inner pockets of his ulster and settled back in his seat with as nonchalant an air as he could muster. They both fell silent.

The night air had developed a sudden fog that shrouded the hills of the city, but as the machine plunged from the Presidio Heights into level by-ways, the atmosphere became clear and cold. They swung into Golden Gate Park and the mists appeared again, coaxed into being by a heavy growth of trees. The pines held the moisture silently, but the eucalyptus trees stirring ever so gently sent miniature showers scattering.

Muridge was at once puzzled and enraged by the presence of his unwelcome companion. Clearly the Mexican had no intention of taking over the embarrassing loot which filled Muridge's pockets to bursting. At least he made not the slightest move toward such an end. What, then, did his presence mean? Out of the confusion there was looming an unpleasant feeling that the Marquis had put over an extraordinarily sharp trick in ridding himself of the jewels, particularly the string of pearls. Undoubtedly these pearls were the very gems which the police were searching for. Up to a point the affair was diverting and a slight element of daring gave the affair piquancy. But Muridge was too essentially a man of the ultimate conventions to relish a decided plunge into forbidden waters, and he became more and more disturbed at the thought of having received stolen goods. He had introduced himself to the Countess with the vague hope of some shining adventure and he found now that he had overshot the mark. His first estimate of her was more than confirmed. She not only could play a lively tune, but she could command the dancers.

Even though crowded with the tangible anxiety of coming into possession of stolen jewels, he still had room for irritation at the Marquis' card-index flippancies. If it had not been that his aunt's entire being was centred on her impossible fifty-thousand-dollar necklace, Muridge would have welcomed its theft. The bauble was a nightmare to the whole Dillingham-Muridge clan. Everybody in San Francisco publicly raved over it and everybody laughed in secret. Whenever the opera came to town the newspapers smothered the personality of Mrs. Martha Dillingham Kenwood under a description of "the famous Kenwood Sapphires"; if a distraught reporter ran short of material, he dug up the story of the Kenwood necklace and worked it into a Sunday supplement story; even when a new thief made his appearance the Kenwood jewels were despaired of—in the columns of the daily press. In short, these sapphires had become as dull and uninteresting as the famous Astor pearls. Mrs. Kenwood's version of the acquisition was a highly coloured narrative involving at least three grand-dukes and a spicy court intrigue. But Muridge happened to know the true story—the jewels had been taken by the manufacturer of Pollyana's Piquant Pickles for a debt.

It was bad enough to have his aunt the target of the Marquis' cutting drolleries, but she had earned the public sarcasm. What had he done to merit the ill-natured laughter concerning his sapphire pin? Was it possible for this trinket to become a pocket edition of the necklace and its side-splitting notoriety? In that case he would return the piece of jewellery to his aunt. Yes, he quite made up his mind to this procedure, how or when or with what ex-

planation he did not trouble to determine. If the Countess had only accepted it! After all, how insolent and droll the Marquis and the Countess were! Fancy such nonchalance, such fun-poking effrontery! The Marquis' words came to him. They tickled his sense of humour, so that he found himself smiling at the inscrutable Ruiz, who was lolling back with all the airs of an impoverished grandee. "My sister is right. It is our policy never to accept anything open to our skill." Instinctively Muridge put his hand to his necktie—*the scarf-pin was gone!*

A moment before he had been planning to get rid of this incubus, now, on finding that he had been relieved of it, he felt a stinging and perverse desire to have it back again. Which one of this trio had done so deft a trick—the Countess, the Marquis, or Ruiz? With one fell swoop he had been robbed of a single jewel and put into possession of two pockets full of gems of doubtful ownership. Could any flaming Spring day have lived more fully up to its mad promise? His musings were brought to an abrupt end by the stopping of the machine. They had arrived at the Cliff House.

* * * * *

Muridge decided to ignore his companion. He left the automobile and entered the café. Brushing past the attendant who waited to receive his hat and overcoat, he found a seat in a corner near the window. Almost immediately the orchestra struck up a tune. The dancers, rising with alacrity, began to shuffle to the compelling rhythm. Soon the floor was crowded. In all the room not a half dozen people were left at the tables.

Muridge was about to congratulate himself that even Ruiz's hide was not tough enough to withstand the last gross insult, when the familiar figure loomed up, edging his way politely between the dancers. He smiled benevolently at Muridge as he came up to the table and said:

"You Americans! How quick you are! Indeed, you almost escaped me. Come, if one did not know your race, one would declare that you were not only ill-mannered but downright rude. However—" He finished with a shrug and sat down.

Muridge did nothing to conceal his annoyance. "Mr. Ruiz, do you realize that you are intruding upon my privacy? Perhaps this is the mode in Mexico, but permit me to inform you that in California we order things to the contrary."

Ruiz calmly took out a package of cigarettes and began to make himself quite at home. "Mr. Muridge," he drawled insolently, "if I were not working in the interests of the most beautiful and fascinating woman in the world, I should lose no time— But why indulge in idle fancies? To be brief, I *am* working in the service of such a woman, therefore—" Again he gave an expressive shrug and proceeded to light a cigarette.

Muridge leaned forward. "What is this confounded game anyway? Tell me and be quick about it!"

Ruiz ignored the order for haste, and went on in the most aggravating manner possible, smoking, flicking his cigarette, allowing his attention to be distracted by the dancers. Finally, having brought home to Muridge the fact that he was not to be commanded, he returned:

"When I was a boy, my good sir, an English tutor whom my father had the honour to employ, frequently indulged in fanciful tales! Dios, but he knew all! Perhaps you were fortunate enough to have such a spinner of yarns, too. If so, did you by any chance ever hear the story of the old-man-of-the-sea?"

"Yes," replied Muridge impatiently, "but I fail to see the connection."

Ruiz laid aside his cigarette. "The old-man-of-the-sea, if you remember, was something of a devil—such a devil! And our good friend Sinbad was compassionate and youthful—*so* compassionate and youthful! He allowed the old man to hop upon his back. I for-

get how he finally dislodged the shameless old beast, but that does not matter. The point is, my good sir, that for a long season the old man stuck tighter than an enemy. Translate the old-man-of-the-sea in terms of the jewels in your possession, and assign to yourself the character of Sinbad. The parable is complete!"

Muridge stared. "And you . . . what part do you play in this diverting parable?"

"Me? I am merely here to see that you keep the jewels until such time as I receive a signal to the contrary."

"Oh, indeed! How ingenious! And how are you to accomplish this feat, may I ask? You can't watch every move of mine!"

"Pardon me, my good sir, nothing is impossible. I shall not leave your side until I receive the signal of which I speak."

Muridge smiled in sneering incredulity. "My dear Ruiz, really you begin to weary me. Perhaps you have forgotten that San Francisco boasts a police force that is at the service of her citizens. If you annoy me I can call upon them."

Ruiz struck a match. "For two hours, at least, I have been annoying you and you have not yet called for help."

They looked at each other intently and quite suddenly they both burst out laughing. A waiter hovering near stopped significantly.

"Have a drink?" suggested Muridge.

"Why not several, my good sir?"

"The night is before us," returned Muridge drily.

Ruiz gave the waiter his order.

"Several nights," he corrected.

VI

THEY made a night of it—Muridge and his figurative gaoler. There was not a beach resort from the Cliff House to Ingleside that was denied their presence. Indeed, by the time they arrived at Shorty Roberts' Resort, Muridge's head was spinning, not so much a result of various and sundry exhilarating mixtures, as from the composite effect of rag-time orchestra's pounding rhythm into stolid, unimaginative dancers, going through their paces with an air both dutiful and determined.

Frankly, Muridge was bored. If he had hoped to muddle Ruiz or even thwart that gentleman's plans by prolonged entertainment he was foredoomed to failure. Ruiz, for all his inconsequential manner, had a very definite programme; indeed his programme was so definite as to border on simplicity—he had but to stick closely to Muridge and the jewels. At first, this programme as announced by Ruiz had seemed to Muridge to be the quintessence of childish silliness. Whoever heard of a man being compelled to keep a handful of loot until self-confessed thieves gave a relief signal. Suppose he, Muridge, were suddenly to toss the jewellery in question into the street? As they rode from the last resort, Muridge put this question to Ruiz.

Ruiz stared at him in amazement. "Do so by all means, my good sir, and see how quickly I will prevent you." And, in further proof of the seriousness of his purpose, Ruiz took a pistol from his hip pocket and nonchalantly polished the mother-of-pearl handle with a slender finger. After that, Muridge began to have a glimmering notion that absurd situations are not necessarily trivial. Here was he, Foster Muridge, one of the socially elect of San Francisco, running about with an unquestionable crook, in possession of a heap of unset jewels, not to mention a string of pearls, and no indication as to when he was to be permitted to rid himself of the incriminating evidence. *Permitted*—that was the word that rankled him! Of course he could hail the first policeman that came into view and deliver both the loot and his swarthy friend into the law's keeping. He was quite sure that the word of Foster Muridge would stand against the first superficial appearance of guilt. He was equally sure that Ruiz would hesitate before indulging in any serious

gun-play. But Muridge also knew that the true story would be awkward, and quite ridiculous, and that San Francisco would shake with Homeric laughter for ever after at the mere mention of his name. He would be badgered by the daily press, caricatured by his club, and figuratively poked in the ribs by his social set. No, San Francisco took an almost childish delight in laughter and it had the unfailing memory of an *enfant terrible* and something of its cruelty.

Telling the truth was synonymous with publishing the fact that he was a fool, and accepting the situation meant admitting that he was a fool, but confining the knowledge to a select few. It takes courage to confess one's shortcomings to the multitude, and Muridge was intensely human. Perhaps that was why he decided to drift with the tide. And a furtive curiosity as to the trio's next move urged him to prolong the agony. There was still the lure of that impossible dinner-party at his aunt's. What did the Marquis and Countess hope to gain by being included in the list of those present at one of Mrs. Kenwood's entertainments? Surely they could not be so foolish as to imagine that his aunt, for all the social shortcomings suggested by so plebeian a source of income as Pollyana's Piquant Pickles, would array herself for an informal dinner-party in the famous sapphires. And it was not possible to fancy that, in these days of safe-deposit vaults, expensive jewels were strewn carelessly about the house for the convenience of thieves possessed of all the social graces. After all, the more he thought the matter over, the more convinced he became that the affair *did* have a humorous side. It is always best to face the inevitable with a smile. If one can laugh *with* the Fates, half the battle is won.

And having come to the genial decision of accepting the situation in a spirit of reckless gaiety, he turned to Ruiz with the most exaggerated and cordial manner as he said:

"I hope, my friend, that you will not deny me the pleasure of making you my guest for the night."

Ruiz threw open his hands in complete surrender.

"You play a charming game, my good sir. . . . I shall be most happy!"

* * * * *

It was not to be expected that Foster Muridge and his friend, Ruiz, breakfasted at an early hour on the following morning. Indeed, the meal served in Muridge's apartments at the St. Francis was more in the nature of a luncheon. Ruiz was proving a delightful rogue and Muridge found it hard to regret the circumstances that had thrown them together. Ruiz had been everywhere, and while Mexico was his birthplace the world was his adopted country. Quizzed concerning the Cortez pearls, he was as frank as the Countess possibly could have been. It appeared that this trick had been turned in Mexico and that Ruiz had done the actual work. But the trio had thought the episode concluded, they had not looked for the appearance of the Señora Cortez upon the scene of their fresh adventures.

The inevitable morning papers were served with the meal. Ruiz, not being an American, permitted nothing to interfere with his surrender to the fleshpots. Muridge, true to his nationality, let his coffee cool and his omelet toughen as he fell under the spell of the news. Devoted as he was to this American morning rite, he opened the newspaper with an unusually eager air. He was not surprised to find the very first page emblazoned with a full-length portrait of the Countess Orosi and a more than full-length account of the Señora Cortez's accusation.

A casual glance at the article alarmed him, but, as he proceeded to read the details, he felt more and more reassured. Instead of the situation assuming serious proportions, it took on an air of comedy, and in every line the Countess scored. Reduced to its essentials, the report branded the Señora's suspicions as a grave mistake, and

the warrant to search the Countess' private effects an outrage. The significant fact that Mr. Foster Muridge was calling upon the Countess at the moment when the officers arrived on the scene received casual but effective notice. The article concluded with an eulogy of the Countess' charm and forbearance during the trying ordeal and an expression of regret from the Señora Cortez that a mistaken zeal for the recovery of her pearls had been the occasion of so much annoyance.

In every line Muridge saw the subtle hand of the Countess Orosi. He pictured her in the soft melancholy light of the Pollard reception-room, giving out her interviews with a nice appreciation of just what notes should be struck. She began wistfully, no doubt, continued with an air of detachment and magnanimity, and finished by a breathless rallying of her wit that sent the reporters away chuckling, flattered by her condescension. There were plenty of innocent people who would have so ordered their defence as to have earned a very nasty reputation in spite of their guiltlessness. But the Countess had used a dangerous situation for advancement rather than for retreat. He could see her emerging from the conflict triumphant, with San Francisco clapping its hands in glee at the happy termination. Even the Señora Cortez would be flinging herself into the Countess' arms.

Muridge laid the newspaper aside without comment. He felt the necessity of chuckling himself. He was glad now that he had decided to accept the humorous side of the situation. The spectacle of the Señora Cortez apologizing to her despoiler was as ludicrous as May Pollard throwing open her house to the Countess. Even he was playing the fool to the lady's court scene, but the fact that he consciously had donned the motley gave some distinction to his performance. He was both actor and auditor in the comedy.

Ruiz was too absorbed in a second helping of everything in sight to remark upon Muridge's preoccupation. Indeed, Muridge would have gone on mooning until early afternoon if a knock upon the door had not startled him into activity. A page entered with a letter.

Muridge tore open the envelope and read as follows:

DEAR FOSTER:

I dropped into the hotel this morning purposely to see you, but the clerk says that "you are not in." If he had told me that you "were out" I would have believed him. Now I must be put to the bother of scrawling all I had in mind to say simply because you are lolling about in your room with a pitcher of ice-water in one hand and a burning head in the other.

Don't forget that to-morrow is Thursday and that the dinner-hour is seven. Will you be good enough to go to the safe-deposit vault on your way to my house and get my sapphire necklace? Your delightful friend, the Countess, replied to my formal invitation by 'phone and asked as a special favour to see it. It appears that she and her brother are interested in rare jewels.

Wasn't that story in this morning's paper ridiculous? Isn't it odd, I know the Señora Cortez quite well? We went to school together at the Notre Dame Convent in San Jose. She was the daughter of a wealthy American planter and she made all of us American girls green with envy at the Frenchiness of her wardrobe, which was always bought in Paris. I thought it would be such fun to invite her to-morrow, and I was just racking my brain for an extra man to balance things when the Countess asked me if you had mentioned her friend Mr. Ruiz in your message last night. I immediately included him. Do you know the gentleman? I presume he is charming or the Countess would not waste her time.

Where were you yesterday afternoon? I saw Clarice and her mother having tea with such a distinguished-looking man. Someone said he was a

Marquis. Is he the Countess' brother? You had better look sharp. Clarice's eyes were positively dancing. I do believe she is waking up.

Affectionately your aunt,
MARGARET.

VII

MRS. MARTHA DILLINGHAM KENWOOD'S dinner was quite the pleasantest affair of an extremely arid season. Whether the chef, or the carefully selected wines, or the casually selected guests, were responsible for the success of the party was hard to say, but everyone showed surprising wit for so dull an institution as dinner.

Foster Muridge's mood was a mixture of irony, anticipation and curiosity. The irony began with his aunt's arrangement of the guests. She had paired off Clarice Merridew with the Marquis, the Señora Cortez with Ruiz, and intrusted the Countess to his own gallantry. He was finding it difficult to keep in the background his irritation at the Marquis' exaggerated attentions to Clarice, and the self-satisfied assurance of the Countess, who had entertained herself by ignoring him as completely as if he had been her partner for life. Indeed, the Countess was urging all her blandishments on Mrs. Kenwood, much to that lady's delight.

Muridge, thrown on his own resources by the Countess' studied indifference and Clarice's unconcealed interest in the Marquis, paid court to his vis-a-vis, the Señora Cortez. She proved a monstrously stout dowager, with an absurd baby face, and enough jewellery to thoroughly discount so trifling a loss as a string of pearls, however magnificent. Ruiz ruffled with fine Castillian importance at her side. It struck Muridge that the situation was emerging from the comedy stage and rapidly bordering on farce. Here was the Señora Cortez simpering down upon the very one who had despoiled her and facing the man who had her pearls in his possession. Not only in his possession, but upon his person—tied up neatly in an artistic package and for a purpose, the thought of which moved Muridge to inward laughter. For he flattered himself that he had learned a trick or two in audacity and surprise since that madcap moment when he had surrendered to the urge of Spring and snatched a crested note from a swarthy messenger.

He remembered now that at that moment he had found the personality of his fiancée a very neutral quantity, but he had to confess that under the spell of the Marquis' sweeping gallantries the lady of his choice was unfolding like a chilled blossom coming suddenly into the sunlight. Could it be possible that Clarice had been bored also? He had apologized for the yellow daffodils to her over the telephone. "Oh," she had purred, "did *you* send those? . . . No, I didn't think to inquire. It didn't occur to me that you . . . Well, you see, they were so *very* daring . . . Oh, my dear, no, I liked them *awfully!*"

She had not confided in Muridge just whom she had suspected, but as he had hung up the telephone he had muttered: "Of course, she thought that they were from the Marquis!"

Well, he had the Señora's pearls in his pocket and he would show Miss Clarice Merridew that there were other men in the world capable of insolent and arresting audacity.

The thought of the pearls brought his aunt's sapphires to mind. He thrust his hand into the pocket of his dinner-coat and an inaudible sigh of relief escaped him. Thank heaven, the sapphires were safe in spite of the fact that he had been in the company of the Countess Orosi all evening! His first impulse had been to ignore his aunt's request and plead that he had forgotten to call at the safe-deposit for the necklace, but in spite of the tricks that the Countess had played upon him, a certain stubborn pride made him desire to throw the gauntlet once again in the lady's face and prove his mettle. Was he to admit his defeat by so childish a subterfuge? He had been waiting with dread to have the Countess re-

quest a view of the much-discussed gems. Already he pictured the broad smiles that would travel around the table at the mere mention of the sapphires.

He again felt in his pocket to reassure himself that the jewels were safe. Yes, not only the sapphires, but the pearls, rattled in his grasp. At that moment the Señora Cortez beamed upon him and the Countess turned her attention from Mrs. Kenwood for the first time that evening, as she said sweetly:

"Why, my dear Mr. Muridge, how very fidgety you are this evening! One would almost imagine that you'd lost your reputation and half expected to find it in the pocket of your dinner-coat."

"As a matter of fact, my dear Countess," he returned coldly, "I have merely mislaid it."

"How very careless!" purred the Countess. "Fancy if one were to pick it up and mistake it for one's own!"

The Countess delivered herself of flippancy with such an air of impudence that Muridge could scarcely restrain his impatience to put the plan he had determined upon into immediate action. The Countess was proving more insolent that clever. And her thinly veiled contempt was only confirming him in a decision to take a speedy offensive. The Señora sat opposite—*he* had her string of pearls! Already his vanity ruffled contentedly at the thought of the cleverness of what he purposed.

Now, with a definite plan of action outlined, his spirit grew bold and he regarded his previous lack of stamina with unqualified wonderment. What had possessed him to allow the Countess to whip him about in any such fashion? From the very first, she had kept him trotting around her figurative circus ring by snapping a whip that he was beginning to suspect was incapable of anything more tangible than a very ominous sound. For at least two days his hospitality, his privacy, his very freedom had been dictated by an opera bouffe villain, who needed only spangled trousers and the clank of spurs to be reduced to the point of absurdity. Clearly, it was time to call a halt and teach the Countess Orosi that there were some lengths which even a bold impudence could not compass.

From this moment on, the dinner dragged interminably. He could scarcely restrain his impatience. Why had his aunt deemed it necessary to provide so many courses and what good reason had the company for all the pointless conversation with which they seasoned the meal? He had never seen any woman eat with quite the frank enjoyment the Señora Cortez brought to the board. Her sweet, vacuous smile was constantly succumbing to the allurements of a well-filled fork. The Countess, on the other hand, ate with charming inconsequence, finding the meal more of a background than an actual performance. As for Ruiz and the Marquis, they attacked the food perfunctorily, but the wine with gusto. The rest of the company, having come to the end of a dull but well-fed season, went through the motions of eating rather unenthusiastically, reserving their enjoyment for the bizarre company that Mrs. Kenwood had provided.

Muridge never had seen his aunt so pleased. Long association with the Kenwood sapphires had engendered in her a craving for the spotlight and he knew that she must be sketching with satisfaction the newspaper accounts of her dinner-party. To have drawn under her roof the principals in the week's dramatic sensation was an achievement that she felt sure would give her first place in the Sunday Supplement.

The waiters were bringing on a *parfait* when Muridge decided to spring his surprise. This was the last formal course, to be followed by coffee and liqueurs in the music-room. He half rose in his seat. A quickened pulse gave him a moment of fluttering embarrassment. He fixed his gaze on the Señora Cortez, and he saw her lips parted in puzzled interest. Even Clarice was beguiled briefly from the Marquis and was allowing a startled and in-

dulgent smile to flash in his direction. He cleared his throat. A sense of the ridiculous halted him. He had an impulse to sit down. Turning sidewise, he caught a glint of ironical amusement darting from the Countess Orosi's eyes. This unconscious challenge rallied his determination. He straightened his shoulders and rested one hand upon the table.

"Señora Cortez," he began, looking straight at the lady, "I have a pleasant surprise for you. If we may believe only half of what we hear you have had the misfortune to lose a very precious trinket."

He stopped.

Looks of astonishment mingled with disapproval were visible on every face except the Countess Orosi's. She was regarding Muridge with an indifference that bordered on sheer insolence.

"It has been my privilege to be asked to deliver a certain package to you," he resumed, "by a person who, for obvious reasons, does not wish to disclose his identity. I have the pleasure of returning to you the Cortez pearls."

In his agitation he did not wait to hand the package to the Señora, but, bending across the table, half-tossed, half-laid it beside her plate. She drew back in some confusion. Then her trembling fingers tore off the outer wrapping and a string of jewels fell upon the table. Smiles of amusement rippled over the company—instead of the Cortez pearls the Kenwood sapphires lay before the Señora.

Muridge flushed with annoyance.

"Forgive my stupidity!" he cried, hastening to correct his error. "I have given you the wrong package."

The Señora put out her hand and Muridge promptly drew the pearls from his pocket. But, as he watched the Señora impatiently opening this second package he felt suddenly absurd. No matter what happened now, his silly mistake had robbed the situation of any dramatic effect. Already he felt sure that the Countess was profiting by the delay to recover from her surprise and shape her next move. But his speculation was cut short by the flashing eyes of the Señora Cortez. She was holding the string of pearls at a scornfully critical distance. Every face at the table was turned expectantly toward her.

"Mr. Muridge," she said, in a voice of singularly cutting distinctness, "permit me to inform you that I resent any such clumsy attempts at a joke."

She turned inclusively toward the other guests.

"These are not the Cortez pearls," she explained wrathfully.

Muridge sat stunned. He was incapable of saying a word. He was fascinated by the lowering displeasure which the Señora threw into her glance. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, and the voice of the Countess breaking the dreadful stillness gave him a feeling of intense relief. Somehow he knew that she was flying to his rescue with her usual dash.

"My dear Señora," the Countess drawled, "our good friend here is the victim of a misunderstanding. Will you be good enough to hand the pearls to me?—they are mine."

VIII

MURIDGE graced the black coffee hour long enough to avoid comment, and then fled without so much as a parting word to his aunt. . . . He was disgusted, chagrined, enraged.

Every move he had made seemed to be turned into a situation of droll entertainment for the Countess and her associates. This last *faux pas* was the crowning achievement in making him play the court fool to her regal impudence. Whatever possessed him to imagine that the ridiculous string of pearls in his possession belonged to the Señora Cortez? Had he been so callow as to fancy that professional thieves allowed jewels to remain overnight in their original settings? The Cortez pearls had been in the possession of his debonair friends for some weeks and by this time they must have been reposing singly and in devious hiding-places, if not scattered to the four winds of

Heaven. After all, a little knowledge *was* a dangerous thing, and forewarned —he finished the Countess' perverted proverb with an impatient shrug.

What did the company at his aunt's dinner-table make of his absurd speech to the Señora Cortez? What did the Señora herself think? And Clarice? . . . The Countess had been discreet enough merely to claim the pearls without troubling to make any explanations, although Muridge was confident that she had a ready tale invented in case of need. It struck him with irony that the Countess reserved her explanation for gullible fools, taking the trouble to forewarn only those whom she was sure could be disarmed.

"Well," thought he, "they all must have fancied that I was drunk."

This was not a pleasing reflection, but it seemed quite the easiest excuse under the circumstances.

As he entered the Post Street entrance of his hotel, at least one thought comforted him. The Countess had got precious little out of her latest adventure except his sapphire pin and entertainment. Whatever design she had had upon his aunt's— He halted in his progress down the hotel corridor, arrested by an unpleasant realization. What had become of the necklace? He remembered distinctly that awkward moment when the Señora Cortez had disclosed the sapphires instead of a string of pearls to the assembled guests. After that, confusion had distracted his attention. Certainly the Señora had not returned the sapphires to *him*. Could it be possible—

There was only one thing to do. He turned on his heels and hastened back to his aunt's house.

* * * * *

The Señora Cortez was just leaving as he climbed the steps of the Kenwood mansion. The unmistakable coolness of her farewell nod told Muridge that it was useless to attempt to restore himself to her favour. His aunt was standing in the entrance and she pounced upon him almost ferociously.

"What has become of my necklace?" she demanded.

"What do you suppose has become of it?" he snapped back.

He was sparring for time, but his aunt mistook his irritation for an assurance that the jewels were safe in his possession. She turned to speed another parting guest, and Muridge escaped to the music-room. Clarice was playing a nocturne with exaggerated soulfulness and the remaining company was doing its best not to betray the full measure of its boredom. He discovered the Countess and crossed over to her. She was sitting in a charming attitude of catlike relaxation, idly stroking a fan of peacock feathers. She looked up at him languidly and smiled.

"Back again, Mr. Muridge?" she whispered as he took a seat beside her. "I thought you'd deserted us."

"I came back for my aunt's sapphires," he said, as he looked at her fixedly.

Clarice had finished and a patter of torpid applause greeted her premature bow.

"You are a trifle late," the Countess Orosi replied, dropping her peacock fan caressingly. "The Marquis left with the sapphires only ten minutes ago."

"Madame," began Muridge with an attempt at severity, "this has gone far enough."

"I quite agree with you," yawned the Countess. "I said to Carlos before dinner: 'I don't remember when we've had such a stupid time. Really, this Muridge-Dillingham-Kenwood aggregation is as easy game as a flock of bilious geese."

Muridge concealed the full measure of his anger. "Will you be good enough to refrain from these flippancies?" he requested in a voice modulated but decided. "I have just stated that I consider it time to end this stupid farce. Please tell me when I may look for the return of my aunt's property?"

"That rests with you, Mr. Muridge. When do you wish the necklace returned?"

"Now. At once!"

"Oh, but my dear Mr. Muridge, I can't go running after my brother in a dinner gown and a pair of gilded slippers. Won't to-morrow morning do? Really, Carlos is very careful about such things. As a matter of fact, he will take much better care of your aunt's sapphires than you ever pretended to."

"If he has gone directly home I can 'phone for my car and set you down in ten minutes," Muridge insisted.

"Why, my dear Mr. Muridge, how ingenious you are! Whoever heard of *any* man going directly home! Besides, the banks are all closed at this hour."

Muridge's quiet triumph began to wilt. "What have the banks to do with the case?" he demanded.

"Why they have everything to do with it," the Countess went on in perfect candour. "You see the Marquis has such strict rules. For instance, he never accepts a cheque."

"What? You don't mean—you don't imagine for one little moment—"

The Countess Orosi playfully brushed his chin with her fan.

"Tut, tut," she warned. "You didn't suppose we were in business for our health, did you? And, really, we have decided to be reasonable. Now I daresay the Marquis would ask anybody but you every cent of fifty thousand dollars. But then we're so bored and tired of the whole affair that we're ready to close out at a bargain. And you've been so friendly and such a dear! Carlos wanted to stand out for at least twenty thousand, but I said: 'It's been too easy. Say ten thousand.' So we agreed." The Countess rose. "Now don't decide immediately. Sleep over it. I'll give you until eleven o'clock in the morning. Yes, eleven o'clock will be time enough—the banks open at ten. And don't forget, *mon cher*, get currency—your stupid California gold is quite too bourgeois and inconvenient."

And she swept from the room, leaving Muridge in a puzzled state of admiration and dismay.

IX

To declare that Foster Muridge was ready to comply with the demands of the Countess Orosi at the appointed hour next morning is almost a waste of breath. Of course he had moments of rebellion which the spectre of a side-splitting exposure promptly smothered. He was a man who flattered himself that he had principles, but, somehow, dragging principles in to settle this affair seemed as futile and absurd as trying to tame a wild cat by playing the flute. After everything was said and done, he was sportsman enough to realize that the Kenwood sapphires had been won on a figurative wager. The Countess and the Marquis had not deceived him. They had played with all the cards on the table, and beaten him fairly.

The Marquis arrived promptly at eleven o'clock, and in the presence of Ruiz received a ten-thousand-dollar roll of crisp currency with great pomp and ceremony.

"Be good enough to check me up!" commanded Muridge impatiently.

"My dear Muridge," replied the Marquis stiffly, "I would not be capable of such an affront."

At which all three gentlemen bowed with the gravity of Chinese mandarins, and the Marquis stuffed the uncounted money into his pocket and delivered the famous Kenwood sapphires into Foster Muridge's hands.

"I take it that the incident is closed," Muridge remarked, as he passed a package containing the embarrassing Orosi loot to Ruiz, giving at the same time a pointed look in the direction of the door.

The Marquis and Ruiz bowed again, and began to put on their hats. At the door the Marquis hesitated, advanced, and said with all the dignity of the frog footman in Alice-in-Wonderland:

"From the Countess—a word of farewell."

And he laid a crested note upon the table.

"Farewell?" echoed Muridge, sarcastically. "How touching! Is there any answer?"

"None, I believe," returned the Marquis with the most absurd solemnity, as he left the room in the wake of Ruiz.

Muridge picked up the envelope and turned it over gingerly once or twice before he decided to open it.

When he finally gathered courage to glance through it this is what he read:

MON AMI MURIDGE:

To-night the Marquis and I leave on the Overland Limited for our ancestral home in Syracuse, New York. Ruiz goes with us as far as Chicago, where he will stop off to complete a job which I started even before Pittsburgh became famous.

You do not know what happiness is in store for you! The Marquis, who is an expert on such matters, informs me that the famous Kenwood sapphires are nothing more nor less than cut glass. They are not worth, to use your San Francisco expression, six bits. Think what responsibilities are lifted from your shoulders by this simple announcement! When you finally succeed to these family heirlooms, all you will need to do is to consign them to the garbage can. And break the news gently to your adorable fiancée, Miss Merridew! Sudden joy has been known to kill! Tell her that but for me she would one day have had to wear the famous— But why go on? She will bless my name for ever.

Devotedly,
MARY THERESA KIRWIN,
Otherwise
THE COUNTESS OROSI.

X

AT one o'clock that afternoon, Foster Muridge, swinging up the marble steps of the Merridew mansion, put the professional calm of Hobbs out of all countenance. It was impossible for that worthy servitor to gaze unmoved upon the basket of bloom which dangled in impudent and harmonious discord from Muridge's ungloved hand. If any colour was missing, Hobbs failed to discover it. Yellow daffodils were daring enough in all conscience, but what possible defence could be made for the present chromatic aberration!

As a matter of fact, Muridge himself had a misgiving, as he set the basket upon the gloomy floor of the reception-room and waited for Clarice. In the florist shop, surrounded by sun-drenched blossoms, the basket's riotous colour had fitted the picture, here it seemed to flaunt a too-saucy air—to be at once frivolous and insistent.

But as he caught a glimpse of Clarice darting swiftly down the stairs to greet him his courage rose again. He had never seen Clarice *dart* before. She was upon him like a Spring shower.

He picked up the basket and held it out to her. She drew back, clasping her hands in exaggerated adoration.

"Fancy!" she gasped. "This—from *you!*"

"I am afraid," he stammered, "that . . . Perhaps it is a bit too . . . Well, the truth is I don't fancy it will fit your . . ."

"You're very much mistaken! It will fit perfectly. I had my room done over. . . . Bakst effects and all that sort of thing. You see, the Marquis—"

"Well, what about the Marquis?" interrupted Muridge disagreeably.

"Well, he was the greatest help. . . . Didn't you know—he goes in for interior decorating on the side. . . . Not that he needs the money! But he is very fond of interiors . . . likes to place people in the correct setting. And really, he relieved me of—"

"Yes, I can fancy he did."

And suddenly it flashed across Muridge that it would be well for Clarice Merridew to search through her jewel case and make quite sure that . . . But, after all, what did a missing jewel or two matter? Was it not as perfect

an April day as any that ever shone upon an accomplished adventure? And had not the performance of the Countess Orosi, and the Marquis, and the inimitable Ruiz, been worth the price? If they had never flashed across his path he would have repented his solitary daffodillian indiscretion and gone on bringing Clarice Merridew faintly pink rosebuds to his dying day.

As it was . . . Well, as a matter of fact, Clarice at that moment was too distractingly charming for anything but a kiss. Therefore, Muridge did not further prolong self-analysis. So why should we?

ON MODERN MORALITY

By Patrick Kearney

THERE was a dancer who, in love with her art, toured the world, studying the pictorial and sculptural masterpieces of all times, learning from this one a fold of drapery, from that a twist of the ankle. . . . She probed into the deepest problems of music, and learned also what there was to be learned of life, in order that in her art she might recreate the joys and sorrows of humanity.

She appeared in all the capitals of Europe, and earned the homage of artists, sovereigns and even the people. It was said of her that she had succeeded in bringing to a beauty-starved world the culture and splendour of ancient Greece.

After several years she decided to return to her own country, to give to her own people the vision which she had given to the rest of humanity.

She was told that her only opportunity for a hearing was to appear for a time in vaudeville. . . . She accepted.

There preceded her on the bill an act called Mifkins and Kiddie. This was a team made up of a fat woman in pink tights, with bleached hair and gold teeth, and a man who earned his living by being six feet tall and weighing one hundred pounds. The team sang three songs. They were entitled "Why do They Take the Night Boat to Albany?" "It'll Be a Hot Time for the Old Men When the Young Men Are Away!" and "If He Can Fight Like He Can Love, Good-Night, Germany."

They also told several jokes, one of which was like this:

"If you don't shut your jaw I'll kick you in the stomach."

"Who do you think you're talking to? Your wife?"

The audience shrieked with approval, and called them back seven times.

It was the dancer's turn. . . . She danced. . . .

* * * * *

After her performance the manager of the theatre followed by a committee of citizens, came to her dressing-room and informed her that the exhibition she had just given was subversive of public morals, and that she must put on tights and a wrapper before her next appearance, or be cancelled.

THE PLEASANT MADNESS OF THE FACULTY

By Vincent Starrett

THE flagrant conduct of the principal and the pretty English teacher could not well have been ignored by the board, and was very properly discouraged. The testimony of children is doubtful at best, however, and while there could be little question that the youngsters had pried upon certain improprieties, the ends of justice were adequately satisfied by a severance of the immediate relations. Roxton was assigned to the parental branch, where his energies might inspire the emulation of the doubtful urchins therein incarcerated, and Miss Claimant was sent to a suburban field.

Gossip about the incident languished after a time, but it might well have given the school a permanent black eye, for it was a brand-new institution for which the citizens of a congested residence section had clamoured long. . . . President Glenn, of the school board, frankly, would rather have had it happen in any of a dozen other high schools.

" Delegations of parents howling about contamination of their children's morals !" he complained, in private discourse with his secretary, a young male person of discretion. " And that ass, Roxton, had to open his box of tricks in the new school ! It's a reflection on me, Renny, and you can gamble I'll hear about it when I'm up for re-election."

It appeared from Glenn's tone that Roxton's sin was that of being found out.

Of course, the Roxton-Claimant episode claimed ample space in the newspapers, but there was another episode that did not. Not a word about it has leaked out to this day, and that is an unusual circumstance, too.

It followed rather closely on the Roxton-Claimant affair. Only the fact of a teacher's witnessing the incident saved it from publicity. A child would have blabbed it gleefully all over the premises, and there would have resulted another public investigation that would have definitely pricked the aspirations of Mr. Martin Glenn. . . . In short, another young and not unbeautiful teacher (this time from the algebra department) was discovered in the stalwart embrace of the dignified educator who had succeeded Roxton as head of the faculty.

Oddly enough, they were conducting their affair in the same sheltered nook used for the purpose by its discoverers, the first pair of delinquents. Power of suggestion, perhaps.

The subsequent inquiry was so secret that only the offending couple, the witness, and Glenn himself participated. The latter was furious, naturally, and made some rather offensive remarks. The culprits offered no defence whatever, and the chapter ended when they quietly offered their resignations and dropped from sight with hardly a splash.

Glenn breathed a long sigh of relief when he read the morning papers the day after this session and found no mention of it. Then a cynical smile wreathed his mouth.

" Next !" he observed, in the manner of a barber calling the succeeding patient. He would not have been surprised at the moment to learn that another guilty pair had been apprehended plighting

their troth in the scented silence of the campus at Normal.

As a matter of fact, an entire week floated blissfully away before his unthinking, prophetic utterance bore fruit.

"Ye Gods!" shrieked Martin Glenn, tearing his hair. He may not actually have torn his hair; for he had little enough of it, but he did say "Ye Gods," for that is exactly what he would have said, being a graduate instructor in several dead-and-buried languages.

It was the same school, of course; even the same tryst and about the same hour of day. This time, though, the offenders were an elderly Latin teacher of the feminine gender and a comparatively youthful instructor in the gymnasium. This was quite incredible, and a carnival of apprehension seized the distraught school head. . . . The whole faculty seemed to have been violently moonstruck. Incidentally, it occurred to him, whimsically, in passing, the disparity in the ages of the latest mooners was villainous. Thank heaven, though, the principal was not involved this time. Rafferty, it appeared, was made of sterner stuff. Indeed, he was the witness.

The cold-blooded Rafferty smiled grimly as he told his tale, sparing no detail that would lend colour to the narrative. But in Miss Witherspoon, the Latinist, he had caught a Tartar. The first culprit to talk back, she did so with a spirit that bewildered and shocked her hearers. She concluded:

"Where, Professor Rafferty, were *you* on Friday afternoon? And with whom?"

Glenn looked quickly at Rafferty and beheld him a broken man. His bold eyes had dropped; his chin whiskers quivered pathetically. Suddenly he threw back his coat-tail and fumbled in the rear righthand pocket of his trousers. . . .

"None of that!" shouted Glenn, who still watched him; but it was only a handkerchief the principal drew. He wiped his eyes with it, and then his spectacles. After which he stowed it away and turned abruptly to Glenn.

"Mr. Glenn," he said soberly, "there's something wrong at the Harden high school. I have no idea what it is, but it is pretty evident from what has happened that there is something amiss."

"I agree with you," remarked Glenn, cynically. "Is this statement offered in reply to Miss Witherspoon's charge? Remember that my private stenographer is recording our proceedings."

"In part," answered Rafferty, "this is my defence. I was a coward at first. I sought to shield myself by testifying against these two. I deserve what has happened. Friday afternoon, as Miss Witherspoon suggests, I was making violent love to a member of the other sex in a corner of the examination hall!"

"A teacher?" queried Glenn hoarsely.

"No!"

The school head looked at the principal sternly.

"Look here, Rafferty," he said, "I don't mean to pry into this little *affaire* of yours to the extent of demanding unnecessary details, but I think you may go a step farther. . . . Was it . . . one of the students?"

"No," retorted Rafferty, with a sardonic smile, "it was the mother of a student, come to see why her daughter did not make better progress in mathematics."

"Ye Gods!" exploded Glenn, and burst suddenly into a shriek of laughter, which he instantly strangled in his throat. "Excuse me," he begged. "Either I'm going mad or the humorous side of this affair is just beginning to appeal to me. It's the maddest thing I ever heard of. The first case might have been anything; the second could be regarded as a coincidence, or as a piece of folly suggested by the first. But we come here to-day to investigate a third case—which, if I may say so, is the most absurd of the lot—and we discover that a fourth case exists! In the name of glory, what does it mean?"

"I have suggested," observed Rafferty, respectfully, "that there is something wrong at Harden."

"It is very evident!" snapped Glenn. "Well, I can't discharge teachers wholesale, although that seems the only cure.

Return to your duties and keep perfectly quiet about all that has happened. I shall visit Harden on Monday and endeavour to get to the bottom of this."

"Renny," he said to his secretary, when he had returned to his office, "kindly call up Mr. Roxton at the Parental school, Miss Claimant at Brigham, and the two resigned participants in the second *affaire d'amour*, and ask them to meet me at Harden on Monday afternoon at four-thirty o'clock."

All arrangements having been made, and the hour being advanced, the president of the school board ventured the solace of a cigar and reviewed the entire situation. Occasionally, as he smoked and reviewed, he chuckled mightily.

"I'll be jiggered," grinned Martin Glenn, "if it isn't the most glorious imbroglio on record. Four pairs of 'em! Eight minds with but a single thought: eight hearts that beat as four!"

He chuckled again, for deep down Martin Glenn was an intensely human individual, and quite the last man to fail in appreciation of a really unique passage in life.

"The rascals!" he murmured, incredulously. "But what in the world can have started it?"

II

THE participants in the solemn conclave that assembled in the school on Monday at four-thirty were careful to arrive after the students had departed. The doors were definitely locked. Martin Glenn, accompanied by an extremely pretty stenographer from the central office, came last in a taxicab.

"If I may be permitted to assume a moment's authority," suggested Rafferty, with an air of deprecation, "I will show you the enchanted spot, so to call it, and, if you care to hear it, expound a theory I have formulated."

He led the way quickly to a shadowy corner of the main examination room.

"Please take up your positions about a dozen yards from me," he begged, "and let me call your attention to this picture. It is quite unique, I assure you."

The group looked with surprise at the principal. Glenn shook his head dismally. But they all followed Rafferty's rigid index finger.

"If I mistake not," said the head of the school board, drily, "it is the portrait of a man, done in oil." His rich sarcasm was appreciated by the others.

"True," said Rafferty, serenely, "but your view is imperfect from where you stand at present. If you will now step forward, Mr. Glenn—indeed, all of you—I will explain further."

"What tommy-rot is this?" demanded Glenn, uneasily; but he did as requested, taking his stand directly before the painting. The rest of the group ranged itself about him, aglow with curiosity.

The president looked earnestly at the picture. He saw only the painted likeness of an ancient scholar. . . . Florentine, he guessed . . . with a velvet cap on his head and a merry twinkle in his eyes. He wondered vaguely what Rafferty had up his sleeve and ended by suspecting him of a mild dementia. . . . But the painting certainly was well done . . . that shrewd, laughing eye. . . . His inclination was to chuckle and he did. . . .

A curious emotion filled him, stealing up from his toes; his head was light, his thoughts frivolous. The perfected chiaroscuro of the picture added strangely to its singular attraction; melting and mysterious shadows through which lights seemed to pass; the colour of the face looked as if lighted from within. A mischievous, subtle smile played about the lips . . . it was the smile of Mona Lisa enhanced to masculine proportions. If there was havoc in the smile of "la Joconde," there was sorcery at least in the twist of this gentleman's crafty mouth. . . .

The school head chuckled again, sinfully appreciative of something he did not understand. . . .

Then, while the others stared in blank

astonishment, President Martin Glenn turned amiably to his pretty stenographer, clipped her roguishly about her slender waist, and imprinted a fervent kiss on her upturned lips.

The pretty stenographer returned the embrace warmly, laying her dark head against his snug, white waistcoat. . . .

Simultaneously Mr. Roxton and Miss Claimant gave a second exhibition of affection in shameless fashion; and Miss Witherspoon, with a sigh of elderly satisfaction, dropped into the extended arms of her youthful swain. The young man from the gymnasium smoothed back the grey locks on her brows. Rafferty, with the baleful eye of a mediæval necromancer, stood back and grinned evilly.

"If you will resume your former places," he urged at length, "I will explain to you a very curious phenomenon."

His voice shattered the illusion. The bewildered Glenn released his partner and staggered to a chair, blushing painfully. With startled eyes and incoherent apologies the others scrambled after him, as if they would leave a community visited of the plague. Glenn raised a haggard face.

"Rafferty," he gasped, "what devil's work is this?"

The principal laughed in cheery fashion.

"Don't be alarmed," he admonished. "It is only the picture. What its fascination is, I don't pretend to know, but there's something in that old scoundrel's eyes. . . . Well, down he comes!"

And he closed his own eyes resolutely, and, stepping forward, dragged the painting from its fastenings, standing it gravely face to the wall.

"*Finis!*" he observed with quiet satisfaction.

"Not quite," shouted Martin Glenn, leaping to his feet with an angry glare. "Smash it, Rafferty! Put your foot through his face—"

The principal interposed his body between the excited man and the object of his wrath.

"No," he warned, "we can't do that. Listen! I've traced the history of this extraordinary painting—the recent history, that is. It was presented to the school, as Roxton will recall, by an old chap over on the boulevard. What was his name?"

"Darlington," said Roxton.

"Yes, Darlington. . . . There is just a suggestion of amorous enchantment in the name. A condition of the gift was that in the event of the school's not caring to keep it, it was to be returned to its donor. The old rascal is somewhat of a collector, and heaven knows what else he has in that private museum of his. . . . This particular specimen of his taste is supposed to be the work of an obscure artist of the Florentine school; probably a pupil and certainly an imitator of Leonardo da Vinci. It is undoubtedly of considerable value; it seems equally certain, although it is a monstrous supposition at this time of day, that it comprehends not a little of mediæval sorcery. . . . But by the terms of its presentation we can't destroy the thing without calling public attention to this chapter of adventures."

"This is incredible," panted Glenn. "I wouldn't have believed it, if I hadn't, myself—"

He broke off abruptly, with a fresh surge of colour in his cheeks, and stole a glance at the pretty stenographer, who immediately dropped her eyes.

"Well, back it goes," he announced, after a pause. "Have the janitor wrap it up, Rafferty—in asbestos—and deliver it in person. Mr. Golden, and you, Miss Lally, will, of course, return to the service at once . . . and pray accept my apologies, all of you. But remember, not a word about any of this! By heaven, I hardly believe it yet!"

But the janitor . . . poor chap! That *did* get into the papers. Newspaper readers may remember what happened to him. He disappeared the following day . . . vanished as completely as a bubble, and the picture with him . . . leaving a wife and four

children to mourn his going. The disappearance at the same time of the old Italian apple woman, who kept a stand at the school corner, was not so prominently remarked, and the clever newspaper men saw no connection between the two incidents . . . but some of us have put two and three together and reached our own evil conclusions!

THE UNITED STATE

By Dennison Varr

SHE was tall, spare, angular, intellectual.

He, on the contrary, was short, pudgy, shrill-voiced, bland of manner and cherubic of smile.

Their marriage was not a happy one for the old, old reason. In a union such as theirs it was inevitable that will-power should predominate, that the stronger partner should cow the weaker. One ruled and the other bowed meekly to the yoke. She trembled at his slightest word.

A NEW YORK SKETCH

By Ludwig Lewisohn

WHEN you and I sit at a cabaret
And watch the powdered skin of the plump girls
Under those blue and red lights glide and sway
Upon their hips or leap in perfumed whirls,

And carefully avoid each other's eyes,
And sip our green Chartreuse—I wonder so
That we don't break this galling net of lies
And decently to a clean freedom go!

It's true that once we saw a luminous
And liquid star over a pearly bay—
What has that star or youth to do with us?
For they, like love, are very far away.

But we are married and the whole world knows,
And you're too proud to break and I too wise,
And so we watch the dancers to the close
And carefully avoid each other's eyes. . . .

ENNUI

By Clark Ashton Smith

IN the alcove whose curtains are cloth-of-gold, and whose pillars are fluted sapphire, reclines the Emperor Seaou-Sin on his couch of ebony set with opals and rubies and cushioned with the furs of unknown and gorgeous beasts. With implacable and weary gaze, from beneath unmoving lids that seem carven of purple-veined onyx, he stares at the crystal windows, giving upon the infinite fiery azures of a tropic sky and sea.

Oppressive as nightmare, a formless, nameless fatigue, heavier than any burden of iron or gold the slaves of the mine must bear, lies for ever at his heart. All deliriums of love and wine, the agonizing ecstasy of drugs, even the deepest and the faintest pulse of delight or pain—all are proven, all are futile, for the outworn but insatiate emperor. Even for a new grief, or a subtler pang unfelt before, he thinks, lying on the bed of ebony, that he would gladly give the silver and vermilion of all his mines, with the crowded caskets, the carcanets and crowns, that lie in his most immemorial treasure-vault.

Vainly, with the verse of the most inventive poets, the fanciful purple-threaded fabrics of the subtlest looms, the unfamiliar gems and minerals from the uttermost lands, the pallid leaves and blood-like petals of a rare and venomous blossom—vainly, with all those, and many stranger devices, wilder, more wonderful diversions, the slaves and sultanas have sought to alleviate the iron hours. One by one he has dismissed them with a weary gesture.

And now, in the silence of the heavily-curtained alcove, he lies alone, with the canker of ennui at his heart, like the undying mordant worm at the heart of the dead.

* * * * *

At last, from between the curtains at the head of his couch, a dark and slender hand is slowly extended, in its clasp a dagger whose blade reflects the gold of the curtain in a thin and stealthily wavering gleam. Swiftly, in silence, the dagger is poised, then rises and falls like a splinter of lightning. The emperor cries out, as the blade, piercing his loosely folded robe, wounds him slightly in the side.

Instantly the alcove is filled with armed attendants, who seize and drag forth the would-be assassin—a slave girl, the princess of a conquered people, who has often, but vainly implored her freedom from the emperor. Pale, and panting with terror and rage, she faces Seaou-Sin and the guardsmen while stories of unimaginable monstrous tortures, of ingenious dooms unnamable, press upon her memory.

But Seaou-Sin, aroused and startled only for the instant, feels again the insuperable weariness, more strong than anger or fear, and delays to give the expected signal of death. And then, momentarily moved, it may be, by some ironical emotion, half-akin to gratitude—gratitude for the brief but diverting danger which has served to alleviate his ennui for a little—he bids them free the princess, while, with a regal courtesy, he places about her throat his own necklace of pearls and emeralds, each of which is the cost of an army.

THE HOMERIC SEX

By Owen Hatteras

THE thing to do was to turn dramatically on one's heel, walk collectedly toward the door, open it, stand for a moment on the threshold and then, with an abrupt gesture, vanish. Vanish out of her life. Leave the creature, round-eyed and staring, in the corner of the room. There would be something powerful and enigmatic about it, done in this manner. It would reflect poise and even a certain nobility. Yes, instead of little school-girl romantics, one fine Homeric flourish and—Finis, the comedy is ended!

No doubt she would stretch out her arms and exclaim, "Jim! Jim! Come back!"

But it would be too late. The door would close upon her words. He would not hear her. He would be walking firmly, tragically, down the street. Decidedly, since there was nothing left to quarrel about, nothing remaining to adjust, to debate, to explain . . . since the thing was ended utterly, such a procedure was most becoming. It would leave behind an air of superior strength and courage. It would be bringing the thing to a close on a fine æsthetic note.

Collier strode across the room and looked out of the window. A superfluous act. If he was going he had better go at once, now, without further manœuvrings. Why look out of the window? He was expecting nothing. There was nothing he was particularly anxious to see. Then why stand gazing like an idiot out of the window? Like as not the creature would fancy he was loath to go, loath to tear himself away. And fancying this, she would smile. Was she smiling? It was like her, dammit, to smile at such a time as this. Yes, undoubtedly she was saying to herself:

"He's just hanging around. He's afraid to go. He's trying to think of something further to say just to give him an excuse for remaining a while longer."

Ah, the insufferable vanity of woman!

Well, he would show her! When he got through staring out of the window at the gloomy, empty street, he would do the dramatic turning on his heel and make for the door with firm, aloof, enigmatic steps. There would be no babblings of farewell, no final mockery of love or even friendship. He would go as if he were leaving a room that was empty. What if he left his pipe behind and had to come back for it? No, the blamed thing was in his pocket. His matches. Yes, there they were. As for tobacco he could buy that at the shop around the corner. And his hat was on the second hook from the top on the hall tree. He had placed it there five minutes ago.

Once started there was no chance of his tripping up on some ludicrous triviality. He would take one more look at the familiar street out of this window. Good Lord! was she too callous to remember the times they had sat with their heads together staring out of this same window, at these houses? Was there no memory, no bitter laceration in her heart at this moment as he who for five years had been her husband was leaving her, never to return to her, never to stand before her again, never to look out of this window as he had so often done?

Collier's face hardened. His thin lips formed themselves into a disparaging crescent. He turned abruptly. Why harrow himself with such maudlin meditation? Why pick this moment of all moments for the morbid raking of ashes. Amputation was the thing. Zip and away! Slam the door and begone. She would catch a glimpse of him as he passed under the window walking with firm, proud and somewhat indifferent steps, a silent, aloof and enigmatic figure. Indifferent! That was the note, the æsthetic tremulo to cap the discords of the past three months. A sort of proud indifference —the indifference of a man against whose steel-fledged soul agonies beat in vain. He had loved her once. Yes, and why repeat it even to himself? Why not soar above the inevitable banalities of disillusion? The situation was obvious. It had no fine points. It was beneath the contemplation of a thinking man. Such puerile heroics were for the magazines and the movies.

He had loved her once. Good Lord! would the indisputable fact never stop haunting his brain? He still loved her —that is, he still loved the woman he had fancied she was. There, that was better. There was a bit of psychology to such a reflection.

But this creature in the corner of the room! She was a stranger to him, a somewhat vulgar, disagreeable stranger. As for the other—the woman he had married or fancied he was marrying, in short, his ideal—he would take her away with him. He would continue loving her in the abstract, in a sort of poetical way. His ideal had merely shed its misfitting husk. The husk was the creature who sat in the corner. He could well be proudly indifferent to her.

Turning from the window, Collier experienced a rush of words to his tongue. He would plant himself indifferently before her and in weary indifferent words tell her the thing he had just thought out. No. Amputation was better. Women were the devil to argue with or to enlighten. Zip and away! Slam the door and—finis! He would some time in the future, in the course of some cold financial transaction relating to alimony or something, address her by letter as "My dear Husk." Oh, what a fathomless, boundless, witless, blithering dolt he was! "My dear Husk" indeed! Locking his jaws, he controlled a curious desire to laugh.

As he turned, Collier's eyes rested for a moment on the woman who occupied the chair in the corner of the library. His heart became suddenly cold. The desire to laugh vanished. A brief terror twisted his thought. She wasn't smiling. She was sitting sunk low in the large leather chair, her face pale in the gloom, her eyes wide, her features drawn.

Good God! she was suffering. More than he was! He had evidently wronged her a bit in his hatred. She was not too callous for memory. She was remembering. Ah, the things there were to remember! The ghosts that slipped about in the gloomy room—wraiths of joys and intimacies. What a merciless, cold-blooded thing divorce was! Parting from the present was simple enough. A vulgar, faithless present; a miserable, perfidious creature who occupied it. But this breaking away from the past, this curious amputation of things which survived only in memory!

It was necessary to say something. He had been looking at her too long to pass on without a word. Why the devil hadn't he done as he intended? Of all the maudlin nincompoops he was fast revealing himself as indisputable chief. What would she think if he did his heel-turning now. That he had gone away with some plea unuttered, some final blurb barely mastered. She would get the insane notion into her perfidious head that he had been on the verge of entreating her to forget everything, that he had parted torn with sorrows. And that would please her; another sop to her insufferable vanity. It would elate her, even as it had pleased and elated him to see her face white and drawn. And he had no desire to please her.

"I think I'll take a few of my things. Just a few trifles, if you don't mind."

He had spoken. His voice had a cracked sound to it. Why the deuce hadn't he moistened his lips before speaking? His voice wouldn't have sounded so blamed strange then. She made no answer. Good. She was too overcome to answer. Excellent. That being the case he was safe. He would loiter about the room picking up a few things, a few of his favourite books—books they had read together. His picture from the mantel above the fireplace. And a few Kubin prints, two or three. Also he would slip the cigar-lighter she had once bought him for his birthday into his pocket. Considering her condition he was in no danger. A deft, sardonic touch to the thing would in no way enhance the final Homeric flourish.

He was thinking of the cigar-lighter. It was a damned, impractical nuisance. It was like her scatter-brained nature to buy him so awful a trinket. It was utterly useless as a lighter of cigars, a fact of which she was, in her typical woman's way, ignorant. Thus it would show her, when he slipped the thing into his pocket, that he was thinking upon selfish and practical things; yes, that he had in mind cigars and a felicitous way of lighting them. He would ostensibly ignore her picture on the library table. He would remain before if for an instant and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, move on.

Standing in front of the rows of bookshelves, Collier gazed with unseeing eyes at the volumes. He had arranged to have his share of the books packed and sent to his new address. He had done the same with his clothes and a few pieces of personal furniture. All this he had done so there would be no need of returning, so that when he left this evening he would be leaving for once and all. What a confounded *poseur* he was! Unable to act naturally even in so important a situation as this. Manœuvring about like some bilious and melodramatic schoolboy. She was, no doubt, aware of what he was doing. She was, no doubt, by this time smiling at him, delighting herself with the knowledge of what a sentimental ass he was.

Through the corner of his eyes Collier managed to get a quick glimpse of his wife. She was still his wife . . . in name only, as the fictioneers have it. She would remain his wife for another three days. And then by some peculiarly simple and unbelievable transaction she would cease to be his wife. Until death do us part! Delicious phrase!

She wasn't smiling. Again the coldness and the brief terror visited him. Her eyes, round and staring, had followed his figure. She was absorbing with strange silent intensity his every gesture. She was losing him. How simple to fathom her thoughts, even by that momentary glimpse of her. They had been lovers. They had known each other so long. He had meant so much to her. Yes, she had forgotten Rasmussen, Vincent Rasmussen. What a ridiculous name! She had forgotten him and the present and was remembering only, recalling only things of the past—their past. She was repenting.

Collier smiled with a deliberate grimness. Heigh ho, what a wreck she had made of her life! What an idiot she had been to let herself in for this, to sacrifice herself for this creature Vincent Rasmussen! Good God! Was there no hope?

Collier answered the telepathic query calmly. With a calm, indifferent gesture he reached for one of the volumes —"La Reine Pedauque." He held it so she could catch a glimpse of it. A delicate bit of business this, to impress upon her the man of taste and culture that he was. Let her in this final moment compare him to this Vincent of hers, an abominable, ill-mannered cad.

Opening the volume, Collier stared at the thick yellow page that shone faintly in the gloom. The beginnings of several words danced before him. He studied them carefully. When sufficient time had elapsed to account for

the perusal of several sentences, he smiled. Let her see that now, in the moment he was leaving her for ever, he was able to appreciate a delicately turned Anatolean sentence.

Tucking the book under his arm, he removed a second from the shelf, Max Beerbohm's essays. He smiled whimsically as he reflected that the man Rasmussen knew as much about Beerbohm as he knew about—about the moon. Three books were enough. They would make his point.

" He's going home to read. While I sit here, alone. He hasn't any heart after all. Oh, why doesn't he go away? I can't stand this . . . this torture . . . his smile. . . ."

There was no doubt that she was thinking just that. A warmth pervaded Collier. He had suffered. He remembered unwillingly the day three months ago when he had first discovered the existence of the man, Rasmussen, the night she had confessed. Of all the idiotic performances he had ever been guilty of in his miserable idiotic life, that was the worst. He had behaved like a melodramatic boor. Where in God's name had his dignity been? How in Hades had he been capable of such pleadings, such entreaties, such tears?

Yes, he had wept. That was the worst thing about it. If he had only realized the situation in full that night and acted as he was acting now—proudly indifferent, superior, instead of gasping and grovelling about. What pathetic depths man could attain. The warmth left him during these meditations and he forgot to open the third book. He tucked it under his arm with a vicious thrust. There was in his ears the cool, maddening sound of his wife's voice—the voice she had used that night. He was always calling it " that night." What a puerile, contemptible phrase, a thing reminiscent of green moving pictures.

" . . . I can't help it, Jim. It's impossible to make you understand. But where is your sense of dignity and your reason. Use some psychology if you have nothing else. Vincent attracted me. He's different. I couldn't resist it. And, to be frank with you, I didn't want to. Yes. It's all true. Every word you say. What are you going to do about it? Dash about like this, whining? Yes, I love you. Yes, I love Vincent too, but in a different way. I know you've been faithful to me. What has that got to do with anything? I'm not accusing you of anything. Oh, so you were doing it merely to please me? I understand rather that your fidelity was a natural and indissoluble part of your love. No, I have nothing to say. Please go away. I'm sorry it happened. I'm sorrier you found out. But had you paid a little more attention to me instead of running off to your clubs and your silly architects' conventions, it might have been different. . . ."

And so forth.

The sound of it all was in his ears now. In what inexplicable burst of idiocy had he managed to memorize the thing? And would he never give over repeating it to himself? Why the devil hadn't he turned on his heel as he intended to do in the first place, instead of dawdling about picking up books? He'd have been gone by this time. Well, he would go now. He had managed to play the ass for another and last time.

. . . And she had vowed so often that she loved him and only him, and would, could never love anyone else. What good thinking of that now? His thoughts for the past three months had consisted of that same fruitless meditation. Was he going to break down after all and blubber all over the place? Give her the final, sweet satisfaction of seeing him again as he had been that night? Of all the half-witted, addle-headed, worthless idiots, he was unquestionably the king.

A curiously compelling sorrow weighted his heart. His mouth felt chilled. If only it hadn't happened! There was a brilliant, scintillating idea!

To live now without her. Never to speak to her again, never to see her eyes light as he came upon her, never to love her or to feel her kisses! Why pretend about it? Why pose? There was in him an unbearable misery, an uncontrollable desire to weep, to fling himself impotently at her feet. . . . It was too late for that. To turn back were impossible. He could only go forward. His throat tightened. The grief in him pressed for outlet. Tears blinded him. He stood for moments, lonely, desperate, frightened. A sound recalled him to his senses. For a horrible instant he thought it came from himself. He listened, holding his breath. No, it was Helen. She was crying. Her head had fallen forward and she was sobbing into her hands.

II

COLLIER straightened on his feet. A quick, subtle smile passed over his lips. Her sobs were like caresses. They soothed him. They lulled the pain in his thought, dispelled the ache in his heart. He walked to the library table. He would take her picture and not his own. She would see him taking it, watch him through tear-drenched eyes. She would always remember him as she had seen him last, ignoring her but removing her photograph from its frame, gazing at it for a moment and then thrusting it into his pocket. She would understand. It was the woman he had loved, still loved that he was taking away. The other—the husk—he was leaving her where she had fallen. She would never fail to weep when she recalled this moment. And he would leave his own photograph with her. It would be a barb in her vision, this tangible memory of him, keen-faced, clear-eyed, familiar-featured.

His eyes cautiously watching her, Collier fumbled with the picture frame. She was staring open-mouthed at him, her shoulders bobbing, faint little sounds passing her lips.

With a sense of triumph Collier removed the photograph. He held it up and looked at it. It flattered her. She had never been so beautiful as this, except perhaps when she was rigged up in her party clothes. That was the way this creature Vincent had seen her—at her best. No doubt he had told her how beautiful she was. No doubt he had. . . .

Collier's fingers tightened on the pasteboard. He had perhaps done wrong in not following his first primitive instincts in the matter and murdering the fellow. He folded the photograph carefully and thrust it into his pocket. It was better that he hadn't done the murder. He was free now of her, of him. At thirty-four there were other things to life than memories. Thank God he had caught himself in time! No woman was worthy the commission of murder, least of all this husk in the corner.

Turning toward her he remained staring at her bowed figure. She was weeping into her hands again. The picture incident had done the trick. He was master of himself after all. A delicious mastery, this, to stand by and listen to her weeping. It was his triumph. It soothed the memory of "that night." It was the way he had dreamed the thing might be. If she would throw out her arms to him now and in her agony murmer his name. Then he could do the turning on his heel and the vanishing.

He found himself staring suddenly into her eyes. It was necessary to say something. He did not, however, forget to moisten his lips. His voice sounded more natural this time.

"Where's that cigar-lighter?" he asked.

He knew it was on the mantel. Despite himself he turned and stared at it. Did she know he knew? She gazed at him stupidly, desperately.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "There it is."

He was getting on famously. If he only remembered always to moisten his

lips before speaking the thing would come off beautifully.

He reached forward and possessed himself of the cigar-lighter, sardonic reminder of the creature's general incompetence. No doubt she was remembering the day she had presented it to him, with twenty-eight kisses for his birthday. There was nothing else to take. He didn't want to look like a moving van. It was therefore time to turn on his heel, to walk toward the door, to open it, to stand poised on the threshold for a moment, and then to vanish. Into the night. For ever.

Why was he continually meditating in such melodramatic terms? Into the night for ever, indeed. He might as well start announcing, "Ladies and gentlemen, to-morrow night we present that matchless drama, 'East Lynne.'"

Well, he must be going. That was better, less stilted, more dignified. He must be going—a simple, natural and concise sentence worthy of the occasion. He turned on his heel. With calm, grave steps he moved across the room. Good-bye, room. Good-bye, Helen. Good-bye, everything. What a topsy-turvy thing life was, anyway. Good-bye, chair.

He was on the threshold, the just celebrated threshold of drama. He would turn now for one last look. Or was it better merely to keep on going? He knew what was she doing—weeping with her hands over her face. If he turned now she was likely to look up at him. In which case should he smile, just a trifle bitterly? No, better to stare blankly.

He turned. Her face remained in her hands. Why the devil didn't she look up and have it over? He couldn't wait there all night. He found himself to his surprise about to speak. Insane thoughts ravished his reason, impossible, horrifying thoughts. He was almost calling her name, almost crying out things which were rioting miserably. . . . His voice choked and he saved himself in time. A decidely close call. As he was clearing his throat she looked up. A dizziness overcame Collier. His thoughts swam about. He found himself bowing with an insane politeness, as if he were asking someone for the pleasure of a dance. He noted that her face glistened in the dark with tears—tears of misery and repentance.

III

He opened the door and was gone. Thank God, he had effected it in the manner of an amputation. He had forgotten the gesture, but the thing had come off excellently as it was. Nothing better could have been desired.

He had left her weeping, heartbroken. And she would remember him as he had stood before her, removing her picture from its frame. A symbol—the frame . . . or the picture. She would recall him as he had stood smiling over the books. Perhaps she would open the window and cry out after him. She might write him a letter or telegraph. He wouldn't be surprised to find a message waiting for him when he reached the club. If her grief was something greater than she could bear . . . ah, well. He mustn't feel too sorry for her.

What had happened was inevitable. What she felt now because of it was inevitable. His fingers sought the folded photograph in his pocket. The door of the apartment lobby closed behind him. Should he let her see him looking at the picture as he passed under the window? She might misinterpret it. No, he had better let well enough alone. He walked slowly. Let her look at him, let her see him walking slowly, quietly, Homerically out of her life.

He hadn't intended to, but his eyes betrayed him. They travelled to the window of what had been his home. An old habit, a habit of five years. The window was empty. A coldness wrapt itself about him. She hadn't remained to watch him pass on. He quickened his steps. Suddenly he remembered. It was an old habit of hers. To throw herself on the bed and weep.

That was where she had gone—into the bedroom. She was weeping on the bed—their bed in the dark of the room. He would take a taxi at the corner. Had he left his pipe behind? No, the damn thing was in his pocket.

With a sense of comparative peace, Collier stood at the lighted corner. The wounds he had suffered seemed for the moment entirely healed. What queer, weak creatures women were, after all!

He drew forth his pipe and essayed lighting it. It was empty. He smiled. Yes, he was a bit nervous. But he had left her weeping in the dark of the room. He had done the thing with a flourish. Zip and away!

He left the curb and resumed his walking in a direction removed from his club. He had forgotten the taxi. He walked, turning over in his thought each little gesture, each little incident of the minutes in the room. They were a solace to the ache in him.

"I showed her!" he murmured over and over to himself and vanished down a strange street.

IV

THE outer door finally slammed. He was gone. Poor Jim! He had almost broken her heart hanging about, pawing over the books, confiscating that impossible cigar-lighter as though he would ever use it. And her picture! Poor Jim! If he only weren't such a fool. Well, thank Heaven, the thing was over.

With a sigh Helen Collier rose from the large leather chair. She dabbed at her eyes as she walked through the library into her bedroom. How funny he had looked standing like a little boy before the book-cases! Oh, if only he wasn't such an idiot! In the bed-room, Helen switched on the light and seated herself before the mirror of her dressing-table. She stared at herself wistfully for a number of moments and then with a business-like gesture uncovered the chased glass jar containing the pink face powder.

A few minutes later she was speaking into the telephone.

"Yes, Vincent," she said, "he's gone. And I'm so lonely. The house is empty. Do come over. At once. You should have seen him, poor boy. But I'm really glad it's over. Vincent, dearest, bring that photograph of mine I gave you last summer. The profile one. It's my favourite, you know. He took the thing out of the frame with him, poor boy. And I haven't another. Yes. Be sure and bring it. And, Vincent . . . hurry up."

ONE of the pleasantest things about marriage is the chance it offers to ponder over the happy days before.

ALL gall is still divided into three parts, owned respectively by maids, matrons and widows.

WOMAN is at the bottom of everything, save, perhaps, the well of Truth.

PRAYER

By Leslie Nelson Jennings

PAGAN, perhaps, and unregenerate,
Denying the refuge of the faith you hold
More dear than life; unhavened, stubborn-souled,
Believer in no kinder God than Fate—
Well, have me so. Yet I am given to see,
Beyond the tumult and perpetual feud
Of the heart's questing, one clear certitude
Of Beauty, clothed in high tranquility.

And is this less than what all hope conceives?
Let the world crash to ruin, filmed in flame!
I have found heaven tangled in your hair;
Your lips a blessèd sacrament that leaves
No doubt within me! . . . . Though I name no Name,
My least unspoken thought of you is prayer.

EXPLAIN THEM

By Charles Glendon

I DO not claim to understand women . . .

* * * * *

I kiss Jane. She adores me.
I strike Elsie. She adores me.
I swear at Donna. She adores me.
I write poetry about Julia. She adores me.
I send flowers daily to Jeanette. She adores me.
I let Isabelle pay for my luncheon. She adores me.
I tell my wife about these other women. She adores me.

* * * * *

I do not claim to understand women.

SOCIETY frowns on love as a gratuity or a commodity. The only legitimate transaction is exchange.

THE only safe widow to marry is one whose first husband was hanged.

THE LAST DAY

By V. H. Friedlaender

I

FOR a long time Michael Fothergill had no idea that whenever he admired Evelyn Brooke he was criticizing Lucie Fisher. He saw them both each day at the office where, like himself, they were clerks; but whereas he travelled up to town regularly every morning with Lucie, and returned every evening with her to her suburban home because he boarded with the Fishers, he felt as far removed from Miss Brooke as if she had been a "client"—one of those exotic feminine beings who glided upon the office horizon with soft voices and musical laughter and frail, costly garments and elusive scents and little dogs sticking out of enormous muffs, and then faded into distant backgrounds of wealth as completely as if they no longer existed.

Yet of all these cliental attributes Miss Brooke possessed only two—the soft voice and the musical laugh. These had at first a strange effect on Michael: he wanted them to stop. For he discovered that, however contented he might be—making ingenious toys when business was slack, for instance, with Hilton, his neighbour, or chaffing Lucie in the rather familiar way that she loved—at the sound of Miss Brooke's voice or laugh his contentment died, and was succeeded by a sick feeling of impatience and restlessness, a longing for something that he could not see clearly. Later, he began to welcome that very restlessness as a thing that must eventually lead him *somewhere*, and at the same time he found himself taking pleasure in the most trivial of Miss Brooke's actions. She was slim, dark, and of medium height, and she was not actually pretty, as he told himself over and over again. But he liked to watch her walk across the office or bend over her work the head that was never either untidy or prim, but about which the shining hair clung and wound in loose plaits, as if for sheer pleasure in a grace of outline that needed no help from pads, curls, ribbons or combs. And at lunch-time or at six in the evening he would linger, if opportunity offered, in order that he might covertly enjoy Miss Brooke's neat, swift way of putting on her hat and coat. She dressed very plainly in dark hats and navy blue coats and skirts, but sometimes, pinned to the coat, there was a bunch of violets (which, unlike Lucie's buttonholes, never died a tawdry death), and always in the hats there was somewhere a gracious curve.

You couldn't say she was not "feminine," Michael insisted to himself, as though someone had levelled this deadliest of office criticisms at Miss Brook's shapely head. But that was merely negative and therefore unsatisfying; what she pre-eminently *was* eluded him for weeks. Then it came to him one day with a triumphant finality. "Distinction": the word dropped from nowhere into his brain, and stayed. After that, whenever he watched her he inwardly tested its efficacy, and it never failed as a description of the thing about her that gave him such strange pleasure and excitement. But he did not dream of sharing his discovery of Miss Brooke's distinction with anyone; indeed, he was recurrently astonished by his own delight in the thing and in the

word. It was a word he had hardly known that he knew—the last word, certainly to be appreciated or even understood in the Fisher circle, and the Fisher circle had been his almost ever since he could remember.

It was the last word, moreover, that could have been applied to Lucie. Pretty she always was, in a fair and fluffy way and amiable about half the time; but the prettiness was of the tragically evanescent order, and when it was done the amiability would inevitably follow suit. Not that Michael knew this; Lucie was twenty and at her best, and he himself was only two years older. But his unconscious comparison of the girls took the form about this time of a half-irritated wish that Lucie would spell her name in the ordinary way. He even suggested it to her—and it was one of the occasions when she was not amiable.

Lucy—Lucie! how, indeed, could she have done other than resent the suggestion? For it was utterly characteristic of her to have made that terminal change as she grew up—characteristic of the petty vanity, the devouring egotism that ravaged her and demanded that she should be different from other and ordinary Lucys. So they had what Lucie called "a tiff," and travelled home that evening in different compartments of the same train.

But Michael, soothed without knowing it by the unwonted absence of chatter pouring in Lucie's faintly Cockney voice from Lucie's vapid and underbred mind, apologized handsomely to her as they met again in the dense crowd on the stairs of their suburban station. As a result, they arrived at the over-furnished, over-inhabited Fisher residence in the over-familiar concord beloved of Lucie's soul, and at dinner they were subjected to a fire of arch hints and sportive double meanings and hackneyed jests. For the Fisher household, to whom Lucie had confided the incident of the name, was not one to let slip so auspicious a dinner-table topic as a tiff.

II

It was on a long succession of such hints and jests and double meanings that their engagement finally established itself. If Michael was a little startled the first time he understood it really was an engagement, he had an innate chivalry that forbade him to admit that qualm, even to himself. It was his doing, he told himself; of course it was his doing! Lucie was very much admired at the office, and could have been engaged to any one of at least five or six young men. If she considered herself engaged to him, it could only be because he had given her unmistakable proof that he desired her to be so. He even thought after that first warning tremor—that he wanted to marry Lucie, for the only world of girls that he knew was full of Lucies, and she was the prettiest and the most "refined" of them. (Lucie was an authority on the subject of refinement, and was constantly putting him to the blush because of his inferior susceptibility to its laws.)

So their engagement was announced, and with quip and crank both the Fisher circle and the office hailed and made the most of it. Only Miss Brooke waited until he and Lucie and she happened to be alone together in the office, before coming up to offer them both her congratulations. Then she did it gracefully, and Lucie was pleased, as her first remark showed when she and Michael went out to lunch together.

"Miss Brooke isn't pretty, of course," she observed indulgently, "and it's a pity she doesn't take the trouble to be a little more dressy, but she's very refined, don't you think?"

"Yes," Michael said, and was startled by the violence of his desire to say no. What had Miss Brooke to do with his and Lucie's refinements? He knew instinctively somehow that she belonged to another world, although he was never able to call up any convincing image of it.

It was that afternoon that he first noticed in Miss Brooke's eyes what he

came to call vaguely "the look." He had just sat down at his desk after the lunch hour, and Miss Brooke passed him a moment later on her way to hers. He drew in his chair a little for her, and she smiled down at him, nodding her thanks. She was always like that—very polite and kind and even friendly to everybody, so that the office supposed it knew all about her. Whereas, as Michael had observed, it knew practically nothing about her; it was only that she knew all about *it*, and used her knowledge with tact and discretion.

But on this afternoon something about her knowledge of him seemed to puzzle her. Her eyes lingered on him longer than usual, and he had a new impression of himself as being somehow, for Miss Brooke, a sum that wouldn't come right. He would have liked, of course, to come right, if she wanted him to; but at the same time he very much liked the look, too, which spoke of an interest that was half sympathy and half a sort of brooding compassion akin to tenderness. Somehow the look, moreover, was connected with that obscure eagerness and excitement that she awakened in him; if he could guess what the one meant, he would know the reason for the other.

But he couldn't guess, although after that he often saw "the look" in her eyes. No doubt before long Lucie would have seen it, too, and resented it, for she was nothing if not jealously possessive; and she would not have been able to understand or believe in his own simple deep conviction that whatever Miss Brooke's interest in him might be it was not an interest of sex. But Lucie, claimed by the sacred institution of the trousseau, left the office three months before the date of the wedding, and a little later her refinement apprised her that Michael ought to abandon the Fisher residence for rooms in town until they were married. So he went, and although Lucie saw it to that all his leisure was still spent in her company, there were the office days in which to wait for "the look," and night and morning hours in his quite rooms in which to think about and try to understand it.

He was very happy, on the whole, during those months. Lucie was pleased and occupied and excited, and consequently almost always amiable; he found an unexpected pleasure in his new mode of life, because for the first time he was enjoying, however sparingly, the taste of solitude and space and liberty; and in addition he had always that strange, exultant sense of approaching some secret of vital importance.

What was it? He did not know, and the weeks slipped by without his finding out. Yet he remained untroubled. For somehow he knew that if he didn't succeed in finding out, Miss Brooke would tell him. He could not have said how he knew. They spoke no oftener than before, and always of trivial matters; they never lunched together or did any of the things that might have sent a mischief-maker gleefully tale-bearing to Lucie: it was only that, as time passed, the look seemed to be more and more urgent, seemed to be appealing to him to find out for himself and not force her to tell him.

III

THE wedding was fixed for a Saturday in late January, and it had been arranged that he should take one week of his summer holiday then, for the honeymoon. He had expected to be at the office until Friday evening, but on the morning of Thursday, when he took some letters into the manager's room, the latter looked at him for a moment instead of at them.

"So Saturday's the day?" he enquired with a smile.

"Yes, sir." Michael prepared for a managerial version of office chaff. Yet here he shrank from it; he liked the manager.

"And don't you want your bachelor fling, Fothergill?"

"My—what, sir?"

"Your last day of liberty, you young ass. Or are you too young even to

realize that it *is* the last? Well, well! You can take it, anyhow, as we're pretty slack. You're off from this evening, boy—but Monday week, remember! Congratulations and good luck." (If it had not been absurd, Michael would have said that at this point "the look," which belonged exclusively to Miss Brooke, had found its way into the manager's eyes.) "And—Fothergill!"

"Sir?"

"You haven't asked for a raise. How's that?"

Michael flushed. It was the one point on which he had withstood Lucie, and there had been trouble about it.

"Oh—I don't know," he mumbled awkwardly.

"Don't you? I do. You thought it too soon, because I gave you a raise a few months ago. And so you wouldn't apply the usual screw of marriage. Wasn't that it?"

Michael looked acutely uncomfortable, for it was a reason that had aroused a storm of contemptuous derision in Fisher hearts. He said nothing.

"Well, it was decent of you, Fothergill," the manager said warmly. "I don't believe there's another boy in the office who'd have had that scruple. And scrupulousness is a quality I happen to have a weakness for—particularly in a secretary. Merton leaves next week because he hasn't got it. Would you like to take his place?"

Yet again Michael was dumb, but now his eyes answered for him.

The manager smiled. "All right. When you can do Merton's work you'll get his salary. Meanwhile, it's a year's raise of fifty pounds."

Michael told no one of that conversation or of his extra day. The former was too precious; the latter, he realized, would give him the welcome chance to slip away unsuspected, and avoid the final avalanche of office witticisms.

As he went out, free, into the keen air that evening he suddenly knew what he was going to do with his extra day. He was going to skate, and perhaps in the long hours of freedom and exercise and the open air the secret would be revealed to him. If not—he would get back to town and the office by six o'clock in order to catch Miss Brooke on her way home, and she would tell him at last, when he asked her.

As he joined the *queue* at the Tube station and waited to get his ticket, he saw that Miss Brooke, as occasionally happened, was his neighbour. She smiled, but rather hurriedly and evasively. Almost he could have supposed that she was ashamed about something.

"Oh, I'm glad I haven't quite missed you," she said with a nervous airiness. "You'll be at the office to-morrow, of course, but I shan't, because I'm just starting my holiday."

He winced at the shock of it. He had been so certain of her—and she was going to fail him. He knew now that she meant to fail him, and that it was because she knew it, too, that she was ashamed. But he said something quite different.

"You? I say, what rotten luck! Why should *you* have to take your holiday in January?"

Her laugh was forced and flippant. "Oh, last come is first served—with holidays—in offices, isn't it? It was now or never. And I don't mind the now a bit, you know, if the frost holds. I'm going skating."

"To-morrow? So am I."

"*You're* going—? But aren't you?" It was obvious that she was disconcerted to find that the effort she had made to shake herself free of him only brought him nearer.

"No. I'm off, too, from to-night."

They had their tickets now, and she did not attempt to leave him. And he found that he knew why. It was just because she had that sense of guilt—of betrayal towards him; by that he could hold her, if he were quick.

"Miss Brooke."

"Yes?"

"You've decided to go skating to-morrow. So have I. It's my last day. Can we go together?"

She stood very still while the homeward-bound crowd swirled round them.

Exultantly he contrasted her grave hesitation with the giggling, self-conscious archness that Lucie and her like would have brought to bear on such a request. He knew that she was weighing his real desire, which was that she should, after all, tell him the secret.

She decided at last, and he rejoiced not only in the decision, but in the knowledge that it must be the right one for both of them, because it relieved her of that shadow of hurried evasion that was no unnatural to her.

"Yes," she said, steady-eyed, "I'd like very much to come. Where shall we meet, then?"

IV

THEY settled the details and parted. Both of them knew what the decision involved, and one of them was passionately grateful. Lucie would certainly hear eventually from someone at the office of Michael's extra day. Even if she did not hear how it had been spent it would mean a storm of jealous anger for him; if she did, it would mean in addition such a stream of vulgar vilification for Miss Brooke as would almost certainly drive her from the office. Because Miss Brooke was facing that without shrinking, he knew with a great finality how important it must be for him to know the secret. And because she was ready to risk so much for him, he had at least to make that risk as small as forethought could make it. He pondered on that all the way home and found that really the only possible thing he could do to help was to tell a lie.

He told it cheerfully the next morning to his landlady, when she brought his breakfast. And he had the sense (in case of accident) to prop up his one lie with as many harmless truths as possible. He had had a raise, he explained, and an extra day's holiday. The former he intended to celebrate as soon as he went out by changing the bridesmaid's brooches for better ones; the latter he proposed to dedicate to a search, in obscure quarters round about the docks, for a grey and pink talking cockatoo that his *fiancée* desired for "company" in the long hours, after the honeymoon, of his immurement at the office.

Mrs. Pierce was all unsuspecting interest and approval, urging only the necessity for caution in adventuring near "them nasty foreign 'oles," and the advisability of his making his last call on Lucie, when the parrot was obtained, a discreetly short one. They had a brisk passage of arms (Mrs. Pierce adorned him for what she called his "liveliness") on the subject of how young ladies liked to spend their last day of liberty; then Michael ate his breakfast, threw his overcoat over his arm, concealed his parcel of skates beneath it, and left the house with the pleasant consciousness of not having made a mess of his lie.

On his way to the station he called at the jeweller's, returned the brooches, paid the difference on the substituted ones and arranged for them to be sent to his rooms during the day. Two-minutes after he reached the platform Miss Brooke joined him, and he saw at once that this was to be not the restrained, unobtrusive, efficient Miss Brooke of office days, but Evelyn Brooke, a girl sparkling with spontaneity and the holiday spirit.

"Guess what I've got on under this!" she demanded at once, in place of formal greeting, and pointed to her long coat. "You can't!—you never will! Because it's a *sweater*. Not a jersey that buttons snugly up the front and that you wear in offices because of the draught, but a sweater that you drag over your head and tousle it—a sweater, country and unashamed and *old*."

Old or not, the dull amethyst hue of it and of the short tweed skirt above her brown boots and of the cap on her head seemed to Michael the only perfect colour on the ice that day. They both skated well, and generally together, but once, when her skates needed readjustment, she would not let him wait for her, and he went off to a far corner to practise figures. She had seen

him, though, for she nodded approvingly when he rejoined her.

"Jolly!" she said. "Give me a lesson after lunch, will you? How have you found time for learning so many—frills?"

"Oh—I suppose because I like it; I've taken every chance." He spoke diffidently; Lucie had not accustomed him to sympathy on this (to her) profitless taste. "I'm rather a kid still, I'm afraid, over things of that sort—skating and swimming and dancing and things."

"You're built for skill in them," she returned simply, for her thoughts had been busy with him as she watched. She had noted what skating accentuated in him—a certain native breeziness, a vigour, the swing of square, athletic, lean shoulders.

"I've discovered something about you," she told him gaily, as they took the ice again together. "It's puzzled me for ages, and now I know what it is. It's that you look like an *American*."

"Do I?" His heart gave an odd leap. "Why—how queer! Because—well, I am one, I suppose, partly. My mother was American."

"Really?" She quickened to eager interest. "That explains, then—" But she swerved off from whatever it explained. "What part? No, you needn't tell me! It was the South, of course!"

"Yes, it was—" he began, but broke off because he perceived that her thoughts had already sped past that point to another. She was looking straight ahead with a little, absorbed smile.

"She will have danced—your mother . . ." she threw out softly, with a kind of musing pleasure, as if she were actually watching that dancing at the moment.

And suddenly, because of that, *he* saw his mother dancing—dancing, with a joyous, rhythmic lightness, a clean positiveness of grace utterly unlike the slurring slovenliness of movement, the languorousness, attitudinizing of any unskilled Lucie. He was amazed; hitherto his mother had been to him only the dimmest of dusty memories and a face in a faded photograph. Something swelled in his throat.

"I would like to have known your mother," Evelyn Brooke was saying, still in that preoccupied murmur that was like an accompaniment to something seen.

"She died," he said, and for the first time in his life passionately regretted it; "she died before I was five years old. So did my father. It was cholera. I had to be sent to England, because there were no near relatives of hers to take charge of me. At least—there *were*, but they wouldn't forgive her even then for marrying my father. She belonged to an old Virginia family."

"And he?"

"He was English—and nothing except what he'd made himself, which was an engineer. His father was a clerk all his life, and his mother had served in a shop before she married."

"But they were happy—*your* father and mother?" she challenged.

Evidences crowded to his mind. "Oh, yes, they were happy! I'm sure enough of that."

She nodded, satisfied.

"He will have been different, then, don't you see," she said confidently. "He will have been himself—not just a little chopped off piece of a family that you can fit exactly back into its place like a bit of a jig-saw puzzle, but a real person who had *gone on*. He will have developed force, brains, personality—something that was strong enough to sweep away differences, since he *kept* her happy."

"Yes, I believe there must have been something like that," he admitted, astounded by her penetration.

She was leading and he following, all though the scanty facts were all in his possession, not in hers. And already he knew, too, that she was leading further than he could yet see.

"I've sometimes thought," he added shyly, "that my father must have been rather—fine. Not that his own people think so at all! It was *his* relatives

you know, who took me in and brought me up on the interest of the very little money that there was, and it's always been plain they had a—a down on him; but—that doesn't always mean that people have been—rotten, does it?"

"Of course not. As often as not it only means that they haven't been understood."

"Yes—yes!" he agreed, kindling to the thought he had not been able to express. "Well, I think that was how it must have been with my father. He went his own way, and his relatives condemned him because they couldn't see that his way was finer; they could only see that it was different."

"The Fishers?" she asked casually.

In spite of the tact that had dictated the casualness, he flushed, for he saw now that in criticizing the Fishers he was inevitably including Lucie.

"Yes. At least"—he stumbled—"it is only Mrs. Fisher who was his cousin—his second cousin."

She was tender for his distress.

"I say, I *am* hungry!" she declared. "There are sandwiches in my coat over there; shall we have them now?"

They had them then, and afterwards they had two more glorious hours of skating. Then Evelyn Brooke remembered a cottage where they could get tea, and they climbed a hill to reach it. At the top they turned for one more look at the lake, and that was a moment that Michael was to remember all his life, because it let him into a new kingdom.

V

In the sunset the stretch of ice lay warmly flushed, like a rose-petal held against the face of the sun. It was she who softly voiced the comparison; it was he whose sight was dimmed by it with the blinding stab of a new pain that was yet all rapture. For he might have seen the lake with Lucie; he might even have seen that it was beautiful: but what Evelyn Brooke had done was to show him that a particular image, a particular combination of words could turn enjoyment into sheer ecstasy.

They knocked at the cottage door and asked for tea, and as they waited for it there was a distraction.

A small boy, weeping out of a heart broken by disillusionment, came in from the kitchen and sank forlornly on to the floor. From his arms fell a toy aeroplane.

Evelyn Brooke hastened to pick up the weeper, Michael to pick up the toy. "Something gone wrong with it, sonny?" he asked interestedly. "Won't it fly?"

The small boy, visited by a delirious hope, ceased to weep. In Evelyn Brooke's ministrations he recognized the familiar soothing-syrup that attempted to console a person for the overwhelming deceitfulness of life; but in Michael of the firm, testing fingers he perceived that much more interesting figure—a possible deliverer from deceitfulness.

"It—it didn't never have to fly," he explained honestly. "But it *did* ought to wun along the gwound. And now it w-won't." The enormity of the aeroplane's guilt in refusing even so limited a service nearly broke him down again.

But Michael had found the seat of the mischief.

"Why, it's only the india-rubber, juggins," he said in cheerful absorption. "You've wound it up so often that it's gone slack. See? Wait a minute. I might have a rubber band in my pocket. . . ."

When the toy was mended and the owner dismissed, Michael became aware that Evelyn Brooke was smiling at him, and that in her eyes was "the look."

"What is it?" he asked, abased.

"Forgive me! It was only—your being so plainly your father's son as well as your mother's."

Gradually, as they sat at tea, he began to see what she meant. His mending of a toy, his delight in the mechanical devices that he and Hilton contrived in office hours, his deep interest in every form of machinery—these were a direct legacy from his father—the father who had been dead for seventeen

years. It was the strangest thing—this intimate thrill that Evelyn Brooke was imparting to everything connected with his parents. And how far it took him from the office and suburban trains and the Fisher circle and Lucie—*Lucie*. . . .

He began to wonder what his life would have been like if his parents had lived; he began, by piecing together his scraps of memory and evidence, to *see* what it would have been like—the difference, the beautiful difference. Again a storm of regret and tenderness swept over him. He saw what there must have been of strength and high courage, of laughter and splendid adventure about his parents; and he had missed all that living in such an atmosphere would have meant to him. He had missed *them*—missed something that they (or was it only Evelyn Brooke?) stood for. No, it was all of them! She was in the secret, but so had they been, too. And she knew it, and was trying to let him in with them all. . . .

Tea ended, and with the thought of his ending day he fell sober and silent. But as they got out of the train at the London terminus his spirits rose again with a rush. For Evelyn Brooke turned to him and said, "Will you come and have supper with us?"

He went. He did not know where he was going; he did not wonder over the significance of that "us." He knew only that his last day had been perfect, that this last evening, however he might be going to spend it, would be perfect, too, and that, in addition, it would bring him still nearer to the discovery of his secret.

So, although he felt surprised, he did not feel tricked when the door of a flat was opened by a man whom Evelyn Brooke introduced as her husband. He was glad that he did not feel tricked; it proved, at least, that the queerness of his present state was not due to his being in love with Evelyn Brooke. After the first minute it even seemed to him that her being married was a thing he must always have known subconsciously; certainly he was by means of it one step nearer to his secret.

They did not tell him much about themselves; it did not seem to be necessary, for it was gradually and naturally unfolded by all the things they did and were. (How different, he marvelled, from the Fishers, who told everything in uninteresting, garrulous detail—except those things that they gigglingly withheld, and that were even more wearyingly obvious). Here nothing was obvious, but everything was discernible, if one thought about it.

At no later time in his life could he have said how he became acquainted with the facts that the tall, thin man who, while his wife changed her dress, laid an extra place at the table and talked about the colours of Spanish irises, was an architect; that he had been seriously ill for a long time and was now getting better; that his wife had gone into an office because otherwise they could not have tided over the disaster of his illness; that she had gone in her maiden name because she had found it impossible to obtain work in her married one; and that, in spite of that work, poverty was still at least as close to this small flat as to the Fisher house, although here it was met in so different a spirit—with no vulgar ostentation in public and ugly economy in private, but with a splendid young frankness, courage and gaiety. All he could have said was that he simply did know these things, just as he knew that there was a bunch of many-coloured anemones in a black bowl on the table, and books (altogether different from Fisher books) on long, open shelves against the walls. For that was the way in which ever afterwards his evening revealed itself to him—not in an ordered sequence, beginning with introductions, proceeding through the preparation, eating and clearing away of supper and ending with coffee, smoking and hours of talk, but as vivid, revealing flashes in which a word, a gesture, a colour, a laugh or a silence tore yet another veil from his eyes, and left him

looking more closely at the sordidness of the past—and of the future.

The last flash but one was of husband and wife standing outside their door and smiling a most friendly, heartening smile at him as he prepared to descend the three flights of stairs. They stood, without any false shame, in an attitude obviously very natural and customary with them—he with an arm thrown across her shoulder, she with her head resting in the hollow beneath it.

"Good-bye!" they said together, ending the word with some bracing, stirring quality; and "Good-bye!" he answered with a long, last look.

For he knew it was the last. It was not only that they had never mentioned Lucie or the morrow, and never asked him to come again; it was that he was now on the very brink of his secret, and that, whatever it revealed to him, he knew already (because they knew it) that it was to sever him inexorably from these two.

The fact made their farewell seem dreamlike to him; he saw them through a mist; almost it was as though he were drunk—drunk with the imminence of his tremendous secret.

His footsteps on the stairs were the only sound, for it was late. But through the noise he made he was conscious of listening all the time for another sound—the shutting of a door. And it did not come.

At the bottom he paused, and looked up the wall of the staircase. Dimly by the one light that was left burning all night, he saw a head that bent over the top rail, heard a faint sound that came down to him from between cupped hands, as though, on a boundless sea, he were being hailed from the shore for the last time. . . . "Good-bye!—*Good luck!*" Then in the gloom something smote, soft and cool, against his upturned face, and far overheard a door shut at last. He felt about the floor and picked up a flower—one of the glowing, rosy anemones that had been in the black bowl on the table and at the waist of Evelyn Brooke's smoke-blue dress.

And that was the last flash belonging to his evening; after that he was alone on his boundless sea, heading inescapably towards that shattering rock, his secret. Only, once or twice when he was inclined to think he was dreaming, and to go home to bed where dreams were permissible, the anemone, with its assurance of actuality, checked him, and sent him plunging again upon his way.

VI

It came at last—the moment that he had known would be like the shock of total shipwreck. And then he seemed to himself to be choking in icy waters of disillusionment; fighting, as though for life, for that ideal of honour, courage and distinction to which he had given the name of Evelyn Brooke. For it could not be *this* towards which, through long months now, she had been leading him!—this discovery that he might still, if he chose, be a cad and not marry Lucie.

At first he saw it, in all its panoply of stereotyped phrases, as sheer caddishness: leading a girl on—jilting her—deserting her on the very eve of her marriage; he saw himself as a scoundrel, never again knowing self-respect or peace of mind. It was only after he had walked himself, through endless streets, into that condition of physical exhaustion which is sometimes attended by a period of great mental clarity, that he began to have doubts of the picture he had drawn of himself—and of Lucie.

He *was* thinking (though hardly seriously, as yet) of deserting a girl on the eve of her marriage; but, after all, that wasn't the whole of it! And supposing he could do it so that no real loss, and no shame or humiliation, had to be borne by Lucie?—supposing he were willing still to give her everything else, to sacrifice friends, prospects, money to her—everything except himself?

It was the first time he had seen himself as his own most precious posses-

sion, but now, on the instant of seeing it, he was jealous for that immeasurable ownership—immeasurable because as yet he had barely begun to know himself!

How well he now knew *that*, at any rate! He was twenty-two; a boy who so far had been almost completely passive in his attitude towards life; a boy forced by circumstances into a clerkship—into the first beaten track that it required neither effort nor money to enter—into the kind of blind-alley life against which his father had passionately revolted, and from which he had escaped—to real work, to love, to happiness. He himself did not yet know what he wanted to be or do; all he knew was that if he married Lucie he would never do it or be it, not so much because he was married and consequently hampered, as because there was in Lucie a rooted vulgarity of mind, a sluggish, invincible mediocrity of soul, so that other minds and souls in contact with hers must be either beaten to that level or wrench themselves utterly free. Hard work, increase of salary, a manager's kindly interest and influence—none of these could deliver him, if he were Lucie's husband, from the body of that death. It was not just snobbishness to which Evelyn Brooke urged him; it was not because his mother's family had been what the Fishers called "swells" that he ought not to marry Lucie. His father had not been a "swell," yet Evelyn Brooke had not distinguished between his parents. No; it was because people (once they understood about it) had definitely to add as much fineness and courage and high endeavour and gaiety and beauty to the world as they could; they had to try to live splendidly—not to get choked by the common dust of their days.

It was a spiritual, not a genealogical matter; people had to give the very best of themselves to the world of which they were links in a chain; and if he married Lucie he would never give the best of himself to anything. And if they had children? He saw suddenly how helpless he would be to rescue Lucie's children from Lucie's sordid mental atmosphere: helpless—yet awfully responsible. To marry her was a betrayal of his heritage—the heritage of healthier body, better brains, finer instincts of which his parents (the parents to whom Evelyn Brooke had so astonishingly introduced him) had welded the link that was himself. It was worse than that; it was to deny the fair claim of every good workman that his successor should not only equal but better results as the fruit of that good work. His dead parents, who had given him of their best, had a right to demand that his best, when he gave it, should be better than theirs. He had to—what was Evelyn Brooke's phrase?—to *go on*.

With a new humility he saw that his time for link-making was not yet; first he had to find himself; afterwards he would know when he had found his mate. And then the chain of the world's life, mental and spiritual no less than physical, might be strengthened, not weakened, by his having been born. . . .

But what was the use of his finding out all this *now?* To-morrow—in a few hours—he would be married to Lucie. If Evelyn Brooke had told him six months ago, he might have steeled himself to neglect Lucie—to bring on that crisis which would secure his release by making her prefer one of her other admirers. If he had been told even two months—one month—ago—!

With a shock the truth smote him, Why—he had not been *told* even now! It was not the sort of thing that a person could be told. Evelyn Brooke had done as much as anyone could; she had for months silently, yet vehemently, appealed to him to see it for himself, and now he had seen it. But it was his own fault, not hers, that he had seen it too late.

Too late? He struggled in the toils of the hopeless phrase—and something snapped. *Was* it too late? Instantly in answer the way of escape stretched before him. Its course was the course of the river that for a long time now he had been unconsciously following,

but it was not that broad stream itself; it was like a mere ribbon of water, a narrow thread that ran alongside of it. Narrow—but navigable! He studied it in amazement, in growing excitement—and it remained navigable.

First there was his lie to the landlady that morning: how easily the truths in which he had embedded it—his extra day, his call at the jeweller's, his improved prospects at the office, Lucie's desire for a cockatoo—could be confirmed; how impossible on the other hand, for anyone (except Evelyn Brooke, who would never do it) to *dis*prove that he had spent his day as he had said he should. And what a natural theory to account for his disappearance that lie would furnish! Had not even the landlady's first thought in connection with it been the dangers lurking in those strange quarters, those cosmopolitan rabbit-warrens for which he had announced that he was bound? He had had money with him, too—enough money to supply a motive for foul play—money that he had drawn out of the bank for the honeymoon, and the absence of which from his belongings could not fail to be noticed, since Lucie had known about it. The jeweller, moreover, would testify that there had been other £5 notes in the pocket-book from which he had drawn the one that paid the difference on the brooches. For the rest, there would be nothing to indicate an intention of not returning to his rooms, since in truth he had never dreamed of not returning to them.

And all that meant that no one would suspect the truth. Lucie would be, indeed, the recipient of sympathy, but not of the pity that alone could gall her. For he recognized now very clearly that it was not he himself who was essential to Lucie; it was the married state, the position, the home and money for which he stood. Well, all these she could have—without him. His will, lately drawn in her favour, left her his small, untouched capital, as well as everything else that he possessed. In time she would obtain them. And in the meanwhile one of the other young men at the office would ask her to marry him, and she would consent and be happy again.

He turned from the thought of Lucie to the thought of himself. And there, instantly, the way was clear indeed—summed up in a single word: America!

Evelyn Brooke had released some unsuspected spring when she told him that he looked like an American. Now he walked more swiftly, more purposefully for the thought; and sometimes as he walked he smiled, sometimes the river lights grew dim to his eyes. . . .

It was not that he nursed any of the emigrant's pathetic illusions about America. He knew well that it would resolve itself on closer acquaintance into a place not wholly unlike England. And yet—there was something!—some insistent urge of the blood and of the spirit that was like a lover's passion. To America his father had gone; in America he had chosen to make his home; from America had come that strain of something in himself that was alien to the English Fishers; in America somewhere, at some time, he would find what his father had found—the work that would not be routine toil but love's ardent, creative labour; he would find himself; he would find eventually that other whom the years held close-folded until he had grown, and grown more worthy. And always, always he would remember this day's revelation that life was a thing to be lived splendidly. . . .

VII

A SUBTLE change in the feeling of the night penetrated his consciousness. He stopped and looked round. The streets about him were still dark and silent in sleep; mean streets and narrow and numerous; he did not know where he was. But as he paused the dawn opened a misty vista before him. At first he thought he was looking at some illusory cloud-architecture in the forest of tall tree-stems that was rising out of the

night. But the light grew and his heart leapt, for it was a forest of masts at which he looked, and it drew him with an irresistible tension.

Presently, very near his journey's end, he was on a bridge, and the winter sun was rising. A line of linked barges glided forward beneath his feet, and as they came from under the bridge the sun caught them one by one, touching them to gold—and divinity. He felt again the sharp shiver of delight to which, no less than to his parents, Evelyn Brooke had introduced him. And in that moment he knew that it was worth it—it was all well worth it!—the cutting adrift, the poverty, the uncertainty, the loneliness—for this chance to feel that shiver again, to go forth free and find out the meaning of it.

But—Lucie? Because of that chivalry of his he had to test again every step of the mental road that he had travelled on his last day. He could not cast himself blindly, even on Evelyn Brooke, for guidance in this matter. *Would* he be doing any real injury to Lucie? A conviction of that would have turned him back even now.

But it did not come. Instead, another and a startling humorous conviction came for a moment in its place. He seemed to himself to be not Michael Fothergill but that other young man with whom (and in how short a time!) Lucie would link her fortunes. And in the character of that other, nebulous suitor he heard, as plainly as though Lucie stood indeed by his side, the actual phrase of unanswerable idiocy in which she would both sum up and dismiss the past: "Well, doesn't it just *show*, dear, that there's always bad luck if you change your name and not your initial?"

And then—in his own character, and out of a heart free at last of all misgiving—he laughed.

CONSISTENCY

By Thomas Effing

WHO prided himself on being an æsthete and raved over Beauty in its slightest form? Who was extolled as a connoisseur of beautiful women and who was it who said ugliness was more hideous than sin? Who was it who declared that when the sun of Beauty had set he would die also? Smith, of course.

Whose wife was it who had three double chins, a cast in her left eye, a wen on the tip of her nose and a figure that would make a straight cylinder look in comparison like the crouching Venus? Smith's, of course.

IT is very easy to think kindly of our neighbours: do they not supply us with an inexhaustible store of odious comparisons?

INFATUATION

By Ben Hecht

THE dolorous night peered Madonna-like into the open windows of the café. At the little round tables, their arms resting on the black lacquered tops, their fingers clinging forgetfully to the stems of glasses, sat groups of idle celebrants. The wail of the café orchestra lost itself in the night noises that drifted through the windows—the noises from the little summer lake below, the heavy patches of wood beyond and the amorous laughter of young men and young women walking across the darkened hotel lawns and congregated in the pavilion above the boat house.

Lucian Walters stared about him for a moment in the café, removing his eyes with difficulty from the curious creature who sat opposite him at one of the little black lacquered tables. The heavy broody eyes of middle-aged women sitting stiff and immobile in all the pompous finery of their summer wardrobe encountered his. The lachrymose gaze of middle-aged men drifted by him to the opened windows and the alluring night. A sad lot, laughing now and then, talking aloud, humming the simple melodies of the orchestra, sipping at their glasses. A miserable company, vaguely frightened by the stiff little dreams that scratched timidly at their souls. Here and there a youthful couple, confronting each other with wine glasses in their fingers and sinning ruthlessly with their frantic eyes. The little artificial scene, so piquantly located in the midst of the solemn wilderness about them, faded again from Walter's thought. His eyes with a start focused back upon the curious creature opposite him at the little table.

She looked like a cross between a macaw and a marionette. Luxurious, perverse, artificial, she sat facing him and the night about her, a sort of savagery in caricature. Her face was like a sentence full of unexpected adjectives—startling and meaningless. The bodice of her dress—curiously folded purples, golds and lavenders—was reminiscent of the Salomé which Van Gogh never painted. Her skirt revealed no human lines, but spread about her in a flare of blue greens, ruffled and looped into the semblance of clumsy and exotic plumage. Her legs beneath its high hem stretched to the ground, straight and bird-like. They were encased in yellow silk embroidered with yellow rosettes above the ankles. They seemed the finely chiselled effort of some amorous goldsmith's art. The elaborated feet were stiffly corseted in little lyre-like amber-coloured shoes.

Walters contemplated her darkly. In his contemplation was contained the doubt and self-disgust of a man who at the age of thirty-four discovers himself unreasonably, irrationally, unintelligently and hopelessly in love. Until five days ago he had regarded himself in the flattering light of a man of precocious sanity and unassailable humour. His sophistication in the matter of women had been one of his most cherished prides. He had during the course of numerous and intricate amours proved to his satisfaction certain axioms and paradoxes concerning the sex. And for a matter of eight years he had devoted himself to the writing of novels in which he had left no convention unturned and no illusion intact. To find himself thus, at the zenith of his prowess and the apex of his career, be-

wilderingly absorbed in the contemplation of a seventeen-year-old imbecile, a creature devoid of any known glimmering of intellect, charm or cunning, was, accordingly, a matter which darkened his eye and filled him with deprecating oaths.

He contemplated now her hat. It was a challenge, a green and silver gesture flung across her copper-tinted hair. It rose obliquely from her left ear, to which was attached a large coral earring, and concluded with a piratical slant high over and beyond her opposite shoulder. It was incredible that the wearer of such a hat could be an imbecile—a persistent and indubitable imbecile. Strange and sinister thoughts were to be expected from such a hat as this—Borgian convulsions, Saturnalian philosophies. And yet he had determined since his arrival at The Dells five days ago that in all his life he had never encountered man or woman of such unwearying and spontaneous ignorance.

Lured to her by an inexplicable attraction, he had concentrated upon the creature, plumbed the shallows of her soul, vivisected her whims, turned her few pathetic mental processes inside out and submitted them to the microscopic eye of his widely renowned master mind. He was within two days of such activities prepared to pronounce her coldly and conservatively an imbecile, a vain, empty-headed, vacant-souled little flapper of the most unengaging type. And having determined this to the entire satisfaction of his critical mind, he had forthwith and insanely discovered her more alluring, more irresistible than any woman he had known during an intelligently sybaritic life.

The whine of the café orchestra dissipated his painful meditations into a curious mist. For moments he sat staring at the girl opposite him, repeating in his mind her name—"Myra Lanier." The silent syllables affected him magically. He abandoned himself with the intensity of an amateur drunkard to the business in hand and poured forth a stream of love-sick inanities, amorous piffle. He was not more than half conscious of his words. He recovered as the last violin note quavered into silence and the cold laugh of a breathless youth dashing about somewhere in the night rocketed into the café. A wave of supreme self-disgust overcame him. He turned miserably toward the open window, cursing to himself the orchestra, the wine he had consumed, the indescribable night and the creature who was fast making as fatuous and wholehearted an ass out of him as he had ever described in his own writings.

II

In the name of the thousand and one gods of sanity and upright living, how had he come by this thing, and why? What latent streak of idiocy or hereditary taint of imbecility had brought him, open-mothed, shining-eyed and giddy-headed at the feet of a vapid little peacock, and he thirty-four and the author of three discriminating volumes and a man of aloof and sensitive poise! He turned his embittered smile upon her face, one side of which was concealed as by a carefully painted shadow. It was an arresting, impressionistic face of stencilled features, poster tints, and provokingly immobile. There was visible only one of her eyes, one of her ears, one of her cheeks, an enigmatic section of her lips, and the whitened tip of her nose. It was not the face of an imbecile. Cleopatra would not have despised so mocking and esoteric a surface. And yet Walters' long fingers caressed nervously the stem of the tall conical glass before him. The memories of the past five days overwhelmed him with a loathing. The manner in which he had danced kittenish attendance upon her disgusting coquetries! The manner in which he had. . . . Face or no face, the creature was an infant and a fool!

She sat with her elbows planted on the black lacquered top of the café table, her forearms in their tight lavender and gold sleeves tilted forward like em-

bracing and exotic serpents. Her palms were pressed together, the pink and waxen fingers interlaced. Her nails glistened like rubies on the backs of her hands. Her chin was lifted, her whitened throat presented a line of moonlight. Her bosom made two little ivory buckles above the purples, gold and lavenders of her bodice.

Walters observed these things cautiously, holding his emotions well in check. He wondered dimly just what he had said a moment ago that had so animated her usually expressionless face. The revulsion he was experiencing had become familiar to him during the five days of his infatuation. Hard upon moments of groundless intoxication similar revulsions had overtaken him. He seized upon them with a low sort of joy. They were respites, lucid, wonderful intervals during which he could most satisfactorily curse and belabour himself.

He sat now elate. What sort of a callow, poppycocking idiot was he becoming! Spending five days of his precious holiday bouncing along in the wake of this half-witted giggle-cursed, insanely stupid and insanely clothed infant! Submitting himself to the insufferable horseplay and companionship of a pack of barely-weaned bull calves who were his rivals for the maiden's accursed favour! Five days of mental and spiritual suicide! What in the name of all the gods of fact and legend had come over him! Arguing hotly with a mess of sleek-haired, grinning-faced undergraduates! Circumventing them by imbecile ruses! Sinking to the loathsome level of impassioned baby talk! He, Lucien Walters! My God, the unmentionable idiocies, the horrifying banalities!

III

Myra's familiar high-pitched girl's voice came to him suddenly from across the table.

"I'm sorry," she was saying, "but I can't marry you. I'm only seventeen, y'know, and I don't want to marry yet."

She giggled. Walters waited stupidly for her to resume, moistening his lips and experiencing cold, blighting sensations in his stomach.

The giggle finished, Myra went on, suppressing with difficulty further and lustier giggles.

"You're really my first 'catch.' Nobody ever actually honest Injun proposed to me before and asked my hand in marriage."

The giggles had their delighted way for the moment.

"Won't mama be proud. She's always telling me that no serious man would ever ask me to be his wife. Just wait till I tell her that—that" . . .

Walters nodded his head solemnly as the object of his mad passion, overcome for the nonce by a strange and delicious mirth, choked, coughed and gurgled an interruption.

". . . that you did," she went on. "And nobody can say you aren't a serious man. Even mama, who is *so* particular about such things. Because you are serious, aren't you, Lucian?"

"Yes," said Walters.

"I knew it," cried the creature with an air of triumph. "I could tell."

Again Walters nodded his head solemnly. It was just as well that she wouldn't marry him. He would undoubtedly end by murdering her within a week if she did. And he had actually proposed! Well, perhaps this final evidence of his utter depravity would serve to shock him back to reason. My God, what an abominable voice! Would she never reach an end to this morbid chatter of hers? He stared at her desperately, half hearing her further remarks.

When she had finally ended a peculiar depression seized upon his spirit. The irrational impulses he had learned to dread as a victim of mania dreads the first approaches of his hallucination, were struggling back to life in his thought. Baffling, mysterious, luring, a creature of insidious and overpowering fascination—she sat confronting him.

He gazed at her miserably. His rapid

thoughts beat passionately about her, like drunken moths hurling themselves into flame. She was as mysterious and provoking as a coloured hieroglyph staring from a Phœnician ruin. She became, as he gazed, something daintily barbaric, something not quite a woman but compounded of exotic mysteries. He waited an instant after she had finished.

"But you *must* marry me," he answered slowly. "I can't live without you. Don't you see?"

Thank God it was a safe topic! And it was the one topic on which she showed the remotest vestiges of intelligence. Hadn't she refused him! He stared about him at the stiff blurred figures lingering in the café, middle-aged women with heavy, brooding eyes, men with sad little secrets upon their faces. He would tear himself away. He had unquestionably stepped into some hideously enchanted atmosphere. He would pack his trunk and leave in the morning as early as possible. He was interrupted in his resolves by a series of explosive giggles.

"I'm so sorry. Really *so* sorry. If there's anything I can do . . ."

One of the hands that stared like a vacant little white head above the gold and lavender arm reached across the black table top and touched his wrist. He felt a chaotic elation. Even the falsetto of the unceasing giggle which accompanied the gesture of the hand upon his wrist was powerless to affect him. He surged and soared, freed at last from the cruelties of his self-disgust, his revulsion, his critical anguish.

"Myra," he murmured, his voice become hoarse and choked. A heavy hand thumped him between his shoulder blades. The space about him became suddenly filled with violent howls. He perceived as in a mist the sprawling figures of four youths—the Bull Calves, the sleek-haired and grinning-faced creatures of the Dance Pavilion—his rivals! They were jumping around the table, hurling insults, convulsed in abominable laughters. One of them started singing the Wedding March from "Lohengrin." Another struck the attitude of an outraged parent and launched into a mock tirade against his "darter's elopement."

Walters became conscious of the faces of his neighbours at the little tables. They were turned toward him, scowling, smiling appreciatively, laughing coarsely.

He staggered to his feet, extricated himself from the violent and horrible group that clustered about him and dashed headlong from the café. In his ears trailed the words, "We seen yuh-gosh ding it! We caught yuh!" And the joyous, hysterical laugh of a woman—Myra.

He reached the hotel after colliding fiercely with a forest of trees and barking his shins on a maze of croquet arches. Fronting the wide steps he ceased his plunging and pulled himself together. He mounted the steps with dignity. It was barely possible that his shame had not preceded him and that the horrible scene in the café—why it was horrible he was unable to explain—was still unknown to the rocking-chair brigade on the dark veranda. He passed into the lobby without creating any further disturbance. A few minutes later he sat in his room overlooking the tops of vague and innumerable trees and the glint of the little lake below. He would pack at once and be off as early as possible.

And for the hundredth time in five days Lucien Walters contemplated himself and marvelled. He wasn't in love. He had contracted a disease—a furious malady which had already unseated his reason and changed him from a shrewd, discriminating gentleman into an infatuated and imbecile schoolboy.

He undressed and lay in his bed, helplessly bewildered. Images of Myra floated before his weary eyes, Myra astride gorgeous-hued peacocks, Myra dancing before ivory idols, Myra riding in state upon elephants attended by himself in the guise of a bejewelled and wonderfully tuniced rajah. Her face, exaggerated in his fancies, became the

mask of a priestess before the altars of Astarte.

He abandoned the notion of packing. He was in love. He had never been in love before. It was the fatuous whim of the gods who preside over such things to see that he should fall in love with a chattering, giggle-cursed, empty-headed imbecile seventeen years old. It was perhaps a divine punishment for his pride and prejudice in such matters.

He cursed, he tossed. And finally, as a silence settled upon the hotel and the wood noises racketed mysteriously outside, he fell asleep.

IV

It was early morning when Walters opened his eyes. He felt he had been violently drunk the night before. He remembered that he had asked Myra to marry him while sitting in the café. He sat up and experienced a sensation of emptiness in his heart. He remembered then that she had refused.

An hour later he had finished his breakfast and was walking mournfully about the gossip-echoing veranda. Men and women nodded with mysterious geniality at him.

"All the world loves a lover," he murmured grimly to himself.

He passed on to the lawn. He was, although not yet admitting it, heading for the boat house and the bathing pier. He had during the five previous days painfully absented himself from this spot. Here the Bull Calves and Myra were wont to disport themselves during the forenoon, to splash water upon each other and leap and dive about. Being unable to swim and a man of peculiar sensitiveness in such matters, Walters had remained away.

He walked now with measured steps toward the flight of stairs that led to the foot of the hotel hill down to the bathing pier. Two or three figures were already on the scene. Myra and her companions had not yet arrived, however. He sauntered down the stairs in the grip of ungovernable impulses. To himself he repeated with the resignation of a suttee martyr. "What's the use? I'm in love. Why not own up? I can't escape it."

He arrived on the pier and sat down on a stone bench against the railing. Two feminine figures clothed in long capes appeared. His heart leaped toward them, and then leaped back again. Neither was Myra. They removed their long capes and stood two shapely figures in their tight-fitting bathing suits.

Walters turned wearily away. His career was ruined. He would let this ungovernable infatuation run its course. He would overcome the creature and marry her. A damn fool and venomous destiny had ordained it. There was no escaping the inexplicable lure, the morbid fascination the imbecile exercised over him. Even now, as he sat and waited, his heart drummed in his ears and his head whirled.

Another figure was descending the flight of steps down the hill. It was Myra, her copper-tinted hair concealed beneath a violently green rubber cap, her figure hidden under a long voluminous cape. She approached down the pier and, spying him, came running to his side with the affected daintiness of a creature unaccustomed to bare feet.

"Going in? Oh, get your things off. Come on. All the boys'll be here in a minute."

Walters cleared his throat twice and endeavoured a remark. It failed. She was about to remove the voluminous cape. He stared brazenly, powerless to think or to conceal his emotion. With a mincing little step the creature separated herself from her single garment and stood before him, a slim, white-skinned girl, lithe-legged, lean-bodied, reed-throated. Under his gaze a blush crept into her cheeks.

Suddenly, as if awakened from a dream, Walters sprang to his feet, laughing. He walked without comment up the pier, turning once or twice to stare at the bewildered, shining figure of the girl. He mounted the stairs, chuckling and shaking his head.

His brain seemed cleared of some

horrible fume. He murmured to himself:

"What a funny kid! What a funny kid! Good Lord, I've been insane. I've been madly, horribly in love with a purple and gold dress and a green hat. Yes, sir. God, what a plot! What a plot!"

The widely renowned brain of Lucien Walters exercised itself nimbly. Coldly and without a tremor it recalled the image of Myra in her rutilant fabrics, garlanded and festooned in amazing colours—the dress with its unhuman lines, the curiously folded bodice of purples, golds and lavenders, the green and silver hat, the yellow stockings, the amber-coloured shoes.

"A sort of savagery in caricature," he muttered carefully—"for 'the sorrows of life must ever be the joys of art.' A beauty that didn't reach to the skin. Mystery exotics, enigmas—born in a dressmaker's shop."

He turned on top of the hill and gazed toward the pier. There, dipping her toes coquettishly into the placid water of the lake, stood slightly inclined the scantily-clothed figure of Myra Lanier. Walters smiled and nodded his head with vigour.

"What did I expect to see?" he abruptly questioned himself. "Something, something unimaginable? Not a bad-looking kid at that. A little too scrawny. . . ."

He moved on, placing a cigarette between his lips.

"I'll call the story simply 'Infatuation,'" he announced abruptly to the trees, "and let them draw their inferences."

INTERRUPTION

By Anita Allen

SHE lay in the hammock. Once more she saw the dark, tall, tanned hero press a kiss on the heroine's willing lips. She closed her eyes, felt the embrace, sighed.

The front gate clicked. She shut her novel crossly. Her husband came up the walk. He was blond, short, pale.

"I have a headache," she said.

THE saddest thing about marriage is not that there are so many *mesalliances*, but that so many of its victims consider themselves lucky.

YOUNG love is just as pleasant to enjoy, and just as painful to recall, as plum-pudding for breakfast.

MAKING love to a sentimental woman is like reading a bad love poem printed entirely in capitals.

MEN used to buy their wives; now they merely lease them.

MRS. LEFFINGWELL'S WARNING

By William Hamilton Osborne

I

IT was after two o'clock in the morning when the bell rang in my apartment at the Doric. There had been no telephone message to precede it—nor had the night man on duty at the entrance called me up. There was just the ring of my apartment bell—and nothing more. I heard it—I had been awake for hours. But I let it ring and keep on ringing. Then, as I dressed, I glanced about me—everywhere—to make sure that everything was as it should be.

I was satisfied with the scrutiny. Unquestionably my bed bore evidence of having been occupied all night—heaven knows I had tossed and turned in it enough. I stared at myself in the mirror—yes, unquestionably I looked sleepy and tired, very, very tired. The bell, which had become silent, now rang again. And there were knocks.

"Yes," I called sleepily from my bedroom door, "yes, I'm coming—coming."

I switched on the lights in the hall.

I hastened now—they were knocking so insistently. But I didn't open to them—not at once.

"Yes," I called through the door that led into the Doric's outer hall, "yes. Who is it—what do you want—is it a telegram?"

"Mrs. Leffingwell!"

This voice I knew, coming though it did through the heavy wooden panels. It was the voice of young Mr. Bryce, the reporter on the *News-Chronicle*, who had written me up during my divorce. It was he calling my name—telling me that it was Bryce—and that it was not a telegram.

"Mrs. Leffingwell," he went on insistently, "sorry to trouble you—but I—we've—got news!"

I opened the door. There was young Mr. Bryce, looking as though it were two o'clock in the afternoon instead of two o'clock in the morning. And beside him was a very tall and very powerful-looking man.

"Mr. Bryce!" I exclaimed, drawing back, "who—who—is this gentleman?"

The big man held up his hand.

"I'm Inspector Breen—from headquarters, ma'am," he said. He opened his coat and showed me a silver shield.

"Inspector Breen," he went on, all the while pushing his way into my apartment, just as though he belonged there and as though I didn't. "And," he went on, sort of jerking a look back at young Mr. Bryce, "we've got some awful bad news for you—if you're Mrs. Leffingwell."

As he said it, it occurred to me that both he and Mr. Bryce were watching me closely—but I knew that I would bear inspection. Mr. Bryce put his hand on my shoulder—not familiarly as he did once during my divorce. Just sympathetically—at least that's the way it seemed to me.

"Mrs. Leffingwell," he said, in that low, penetrating voice of his, "you're not going to be grief-stricken, believe me. But you're going to be shocked. Leffingwell, your husband, has been killed . . ."

I looked from him to Inspector Breen. It seemed a long while before I spoke.

"How?" I asked, finally. "Was it an accident—was he drunk—did he fall? Are you sure?"

"Sure that he was killed?" returned Inspector Breen, eyeing me gravely and shaking his head. "With a man like that it had come at last. . . ."

And it seemed to me that he was trying to be sympathetic—and moral—and couldn't quite make it. Or, possibly, he was just playing a part. I've never understood Inspector Breen—they tell me he's a very wonderful man in his line. I'm sure it's true.

"I want to know how—and where," I went on. "Where is he now? Do you—think I ought to go?"

It was Mr. Bryce who answered—and I could feel his hand still on my shoulder. "He was shot by Elsie Adams in her Tory Corner cottage, sometime after ten o'clock to-night," he said.

"Elsie Adams!" I echoed.

The Inspector evidently thought I didn't understand—didn't know who Elsie Adams was.

"The girl of all others," he said, "who ought to have been named as co-respondent in your suit."

I remember catching at Mr. Bryce's arm.

"Tell me!" I demanded.

"It was she who gave the alarm," Mr. Bryce told me; "it was Elsie herself who called up the police. The plain clothes men who were sent out found her there—her mother was upstairs, sick in bed. They found her and Leffingwell—a doctor had worked over him to no good. He'd been shot through the head. And the revolver was lying on the floor, just where she'd thrown it. The doctor, even, hadn't touched it. The doctor said that she'd refused to touch it . . ."

"Why did she shoot him?" I demanded.

"Sam," exclaimed Mr. Bryce suddenly to the other man, "will you get that decanter over there? She's limp as a rag—wait till you get a little bracer, Mrs. Leffingwell."

They made me take it. They insisted on waiting till I felt better.

"What did she do it for?" I insisted.

"She denies that she did it at all," returned Mr. Bryce. "Says she heard the shot but didn't see it. She talked—she gave up everything she knew—except that she didn't do the trick, and Leffingwell himself didn't do it. She insists on that."

"You—you've been there?" I gasped.

"Came from there to here," he answered, "and, as I say, this Elsie Adams denies the whole thing. Merely says that Leffingwell and she were to be married to-morrow, and were going at once, with her mother, to South America. Leffingwell was going to begin life all over again—with her. And while they were talking—but just when she wasn't looking, so she says—then there was the shot—just at that time. She didn't see any flash. Just heard the shot. Leffingwell keeled over—slumped to the floor. She tried to lift him. . . . When she looked around, the revolver was lying on the floor—first time she'd seen it. She says that's all she knows. Fishy story. No servant in the house. Her mother upstairs, sick. Nobody else around."

The Inspector had been staring admiringly at my white bearskin rug. All the while Mr. Bryce talked he kept looking at it from time to time. And while he looked I could see that he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for something. When Mr. Bryce stopped talking the Inspector stopped looking at the rug and looked at me.

"What ought I to do?" I asked them. "It isn't that Leffingwell is nothing to me, living or dead. He was my husband once. I want to do what I ought to do. And I want to do it now. I can't think for myself. Ought I go—to wherever he is?"

The Inspector stooped and picked up something from the bearskin.

"Chunk o' dirt on your white rug," he said.

He crossed the room and threw it into a waste-basket. At least I thought he did, for I heard it fall in among the loose paper. Somehow it occurred to me that he had only pretended to find a piece of dirt—and that he wanted to get a view of my disordered bedroom—the waste-basket stood to one side of

my open bedroom door. But he didn't seem to look. He came back, shaking his head.

"There's no call, ma'am," he said gravely, as though he had thought it all out, "for you to do anything at all. The only reason we came to you at all is because Mr. Bryce here has got this to write up for his paper—and when we left Tory Corner he told me he was coming here and I said I'd come along. There's nothing to do. The Adams girl is under arrest. We've got the revolver . . ."

"Why would she do it?" I demanded.

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders.

"Why would any woman kill Leffingwell?" he queried. "A drunk like him—with a dozen women whining at his heels. It ain't that this Adams girl is like the rest of 'em. My opinion is that Leffingwell's the only fellow she ever cared for. And my opinion is that he was just keeping her on a string—until you'd got your divorce and he was free. Then—you know how a fellow like that is—the minute he was free he didn't want to be tied down to any Elsie Adams. And she wanted to be tied down—and wanted him to be. We'll get it out of her sooner or later—though she's a wonder at her line of talk. But she's the girl that knows just what happened in that little living-room out at Tory Corner and she's got to tell! There's two lines of argument, it seems to me. Either he came there drunk to-night and attacked her and she shot him in self-defence—or else she's known he was going to leave her cold—and she waited for him to say so straight out—and then shot him. . . . As for you, ma'am, there's no call for you to do anything—not even to go into mourning. The courts have freed you—the courts right here. And now the higher court—that's freed you, to. You're rid of a bad bargain. That's all I've got to say."

When they had gone I double-locked the hall door. Then I switched off the lights in the living-room and made a bee-line for the waste-basket.

I carried the basket into my bedroom and turned its contents out upon a newspaper which I opened on the floor. The basket contained but one unfamiliar object—the small stub of a dirty lead pencil that smelt strongly of tobacco. There was no chunk of dirt.

Yet there had been a chunk of dirt, and Inspector Breen had picked it up. I saw it later, once and only once.

I saw it in the shape of fine red powder, when it was passed to the jury in the folds of a small piece of white paper, months later, in a courtroom, at the trial.

II

THEY tell me now that I have but half a day to live. That means just the rest of the night—less than twelve hours now, they say. Mr. Devon, the rector of St. Mark's, is with me. He is a Protestant—but he tells me, earnestly, that I may believe in purgatory. He gives me every hope. I feel sure that he believes in it himself.

I am dictating this statement to Miss Bates—she takes down everything just as I say it—it is to be revised by Mr. Devon later. Miss Bates is fine—she has stood by me through thick and thin—I think and hope that she understands. She tells me that she does—that she really does. She is the managing clerk to my lawyers—they have let her stay with me, until what is to happen to me happens.

I am writing this in the full consciousness that I have but one night more to live. Mr. Devon, the rector of St. Mark's, says that it is essential that I tell the exact truth—just the unvarnished facts as they are. They will stand out, he tells me, in the memory of any woman who reads them. It will be this full, frank confession that will help me—just as it is, it will stand as a terrible warning to women about to make the same terrible mistake I made.

I have already told him that before I did what I did—that it is true I followed the trial of two other women closely—Mrs. Cockcroft's murder trial

in Pennsylvania—Mrs. Delatour's in New Jersey. He asks me to realize what effect the acquital of those women had upon my mind. He wants to know whether it wasn't those trials that made me feel secure—that justified me in my own mind. To make his point clear, he wonders whether Mrs. Delatour would have done what she did if Mrs. Cockcroft's trial had gone wrong—and whether Mrs. Cockcroft's crime would have been committed if the McIntyre woman had been convicted three years ago or more. With my mind upon these things I can realize, he tells me, that if I tell the truth and all the truth—no matter what I swore to at the trial—my statement will save the lives of a number of men hereafter. By their fruits ye shall know them, he tells me. . . . He indulges a great hope for me if I will tell the truth. God help me, I shall try. . . .

III

It was months before the murder that I learned to keep a diary. It was a trick I learned at the trial of Mrs. Cockcroft. Mrs. Cockcroft kept one—and, as you know, she was a good writer and a very intelligent woman, and her diary was one of the things that helped her. They said it was a blunder of the District Attorney ever to cross-examine her on it—for the result was that the whole diary got in, as they say, and showed up her side better than anything else could have done—and her jury actually believed that a woman who was half crazed could really go and write down how half crazed she was—do it in fine sentences—in cold blood. I read yesterday—in a news article about my case—that Mrs. Cockcroft is spending this winter in Jacksonville, Florida. . . . I have less than twelve hours to live.

My diary helps me out. I have it here. I am referring to it in making up this statement—but only to refresh my recollection. My diary—most of it is lies! *Here* is the truth. . . .

It was a month before the last big suffragist parade that I drove up to Cardozo's place to order a new riding habit—I was to be one of the marshals of the procession. Cardozo himself received me at his smart shop in his smart way—and then, with a queer look in his eyes, turned me over to his credit-man. His credit-man bowed me into his own private little office, and shut the door behind me. He was very polite. He explained to me that the habit I was ordering would cost in the neighbourhood of four hundred and fifty dollars, including the accessories. I had not stopped to ask the price. He went on. Cardozo's were, of course, honoured by my order—but it would be impossible for them to fill the order unless I could pay cash. They desired above all things to retain my custom, but . . .

I didn't know what it meant—and I didn't ask.

"You will fill this order," I warned the credit-man, beside myself with the offence of the thing, "and charge it to my husband. He is perfectly good for it. If you decline, then Cardozo's has seen the last of me."

The credit-manager was profuse in his apology. He handed me a letter.

"It is Mr. Leffingwell who interferes," he said.

I read the letter. It was Dolf's. It was addressed to Cardozo's. I discovered later that it was but one of many letters he had sent out the day before to all my stores in town. The letter was brief enough—it stated that owing to his present financial condition he preferred that no more credit be extended to his wife. He declined to pay further bills. He asked that if any controversy arose about the matter, that the matter be referred to him.

You can understand after that that if I left Cardozo's in a huff I reached home in a perfect rage—for the time was short and I had to have a decent riding habit. I canvassed all the stores on my list—they declined, in the circumstances, to take my order.

I sent for Dolf that night—of course we didn't live together—and Dolf came.

I must say for him that he was always willing to talk. He found me in the same condition that I had come home in—in a tearing rage. Why I didn't have the nerve to kill him in one of my rages I can't understand—why did I wait—why did I plot and plan?

At any rate, he came to me—he was drunk as usual. He was in good spirits—wanted to hug me—wanted to elope with me, even though I was his wife—he babbled senselessly about beginning life again.

I had made Cardozo's man give me the letter he'd shown me. I pulled it out now and thrust it into Dolf's drunken face with all my strength. It was a blow—a swift, strong blow—and it sobered him at once. He picked up the letter from the floor and read it. Then I flared out at him—with me it was the end—the limit. Any man who could humiliate his wife like that—with the credit-managers of the shop where I'd always traded—a man like that was as low as any that ever lived.

"But, look-a-here," Dolf said—and suddenly he frowned with that ugly frown of his—"I told you a month ago that you mustn't order any more on credit. What's more, I told you if you kept it up I'd have to do this very thing. What's more, I even gave you a copy of the letter I proposed to send—a copy of this—advance copy. You've got it somewhere unless you tore it up. I gave you fair warning about the thing—but you kept right on. . . ."

He had given me warning, it is true—and he had given me a copy of the letter. But that he would be nasty enough to carry out his threat!

"What flummery were you tryin' to buy to-day?" he asked, leering at me. I tried not to answer him, but I found myself flashing out at him that if I didn't have my riding habit in time for the suffragist parade that I'd kill him—I meant it, too.

"Now, look-a-here," he said, still leering at me in that peculiarly insulting way of his, "I got a memory that's a yard long at any rate. You've got a riding habit—and all the fixings. And a good one—unless you've grown too stout from doing nothing. Suffrage parade—and you a marshal, eh? It'll rain anyhow, it always does. Then who'll know the diff?

"Look here," he presently went on, weaving to and fro in the chair he lurched into, "Suffrage. You a suffrage leader? Seems to me I've seen your picture in the papers—worth looking at, too, Nella, I'll say that for you. Suffrage—good. But what are you doing for the cause? Work, I mean—what work? How much flesh are you losing for the cause? How much self-denial have you practised? That's the idea. That's what makes any cause—work and self-denial. Not riding habits. . . ."

He stopped and stuck his hand in his trousers pocket.

He drew out a lot of bills—all mussed up, they were. He straightened them out somehow and counted out two hundred dollars and laid them on the table.

"Nella," he said to me, "there's a couple of hundred—it's the best that I can do. . . ."

I was at the table in a flash. I clutched the money, twisted it into a crumpled ball and flung it at him.

"I need five hundred dollars for my outfit," I told him. "You can take your two hundred dollars with you when you go—and you'll go right now!"

He left the money on the floor—and I left it there. Later I picked it up and used it—after he was gone. Now he kept leering at me—laughing at me in his maudlin way.

"Outfit—outfit!" he kept repeating. "I didn't give you the two hundred for any outfit. I gave it to you for the cause. I'm no suffragist. You are—and I want to see you a good one while you're about it. That two hundred I give to you in trust—it's for the cause. You wear your old riding habit—that's the idea. Have it let out—or work yourself down into it—you've got some weeks left yet. You do that. And give this two hundred to the cause. You

say you're a suffragist—then be one. A little self-denial — here's your chance. . . ."

You can understand how any woman would feel under the lash of his drunken insults. I was so beside myself that I didn't care whether he took the two hundred dollars with him or not. In the end he didn't take it—and in the end I made Cardozo fix me up for the two hundred. I'd spent thousands at Cardozo's—they could afford to favour me this once.

But I'm not through with Dolf's visit. The angrier I got the more insulting he got. What's more, he tried to become serious—affected to be angry himself.

"Look here, Nella," he said to me finally, kicking the wad of bills into a corner, "I can't stand it—I simply can't. You married a five-thousand-dollar-a-year man—that's what you married, and you knew it."

Talk like that, you see! When every man makes at least ten thousand dollars a year. Any man that calls himself a business man, to say the least.

"And you weren't satisfied," he went on. "You wanted fifteen thousand. And I made it, fool that I was. And you wern't satisfied even then. And I made twenty-five thousand dollars. And you're not satisfied now. And it's broke me. You had a good man in your hands—to make or break him—and you broke him with your demands—broke him on the wheel—broke his nerve—made him a rummy. It's made me a genteel fool—that's what it's done."

"You understate the case," I reminded him. "You happen to be a beast and a rotter. What about the twenty thousand dollars that I had when I married you? You stole that—deliberately stole it. Give it back to me. I want it now!"

"You handed it to me, and I took it," he admitted. "What a fool I was! I ought to have put it into a business—I ought to have made it the foundation of a decent career. If you call it stealing, well and good. I can't give it back—I'm broke. But I can account for it—every cent. Every blasted cent of that money—it wasn't twenty thousand—every blasted cent went long ago to pay your bills. . . ."

"*Your* bills," I retorted, "for your wine and—*your* women!"

IV

HERE I am warned again by Mr. Devon. He repeats that I must tell the truth and nothing but the truth. He asks me to record his warning here—he wants to make it plain to me that I must not even give wrong impressions. I must give the truth in spirit as in letter. I understand. I shall do my best to obey. I'll tell the truth, and particularly about my twenty thousand dollars. It wasn't twenty thousand—it was about fourteen. And I let Dolf have it. And we lived it up—yes, that is true.

I am quite sure that the bills for my clothes for the first three years after our marriage ranged over five thousand a year. But I had my own viewpoint about that—and I have it now. It was his business to pay for them. It was his business to earn money to pay for them. Any man can earn all the money he wants if he'll go downtown to his desk and work there all day—work hard. Mr. Devon smiles at me. He wants to know whether I think the rector of St. Mark's works hard—and also how much he earns. And how much more he can earn by working harder. And who will pay it.

I don't see what that has to do with it. After the first two or three years Dolf didn't work—he didn't work hard at any rate, even though for a time he did make more money. And I have never been unreasonable. I am telling the truth when I say that I was a very pretty woman—but all the more I needed stylish clothes. Dolf knew that when he married me. The whole thing was very simple. All he had to do was to do his part—see to it that he earned enough to enable us to live in the style that we should live. That's where he failed in his duty—that, first. Then later, the drink—and the women.

But I am not through with Dolf's visit that night. When I mentioned his bills — and his women — Dolf stopped short. He couldn't answer that, so he changed his tack—of course adding insult to injury.

"Look here, Nella," he said, "let's cut out the whole rotten business."

You can see his self-centered point of view—you can see how he thrust forth his claim all the while—*his* claim that he was badly treated—that somehow I was at fault. It wasn't *he* that was to cut out the whole rotten business—it was both of us. The rotten business was *our* affair, not his alone.

"Let's cut out the whole rotten business," he went on. "I don't want to drink—I want to live. I don't want other women—I want you. Let's quit—let's go somewhere, where we don't have to spend money — somewhere where I can earn enough to live on. I can earn something. I'm good enough for that. I can get a job in South America for a hundred a week—easy. In time I can double that. In time we can save money. And we won't have to keep up appearances. And I'll live straight. And we'll have children—and live happy ever after. . . ."

Children! You can see the impossible conditions Dolf tried to impose from the start. Ever since we married he had harped on children. Think of our children, with *him* for their father! And, besides, he never yet had earned enough to keep the two of us, let alone more. Children! And he couldn't even pay *my* bills. . . .

"Come on," he urged, "we've made a mess of things. . . ."

"*We?*" I reminded him.

"Well, *I* have," he admitted, "but it's not too late to start fresh. Let's try it once. I'll cut out drink—I'll cut out everything."

He sort of held out his hands toward me. I was ready for that. I looked him straight in the eyes.

"Have you finished your maudlin speeches?" I asked him. "If you have, I've got something to say—something that isn't maudlin. This is it. You're a brute and a rotter. You have treated me as no man that calls himself a man could ever treat a woman. You've insulted and humiliated me beyond measure. Now, I want a divorce. I'm going to have a divorce, and I'm going to start right now!"

It staggered him, I think. But he saw that I meant it—saw there was no use of further parley. I could see that it had made him angry.

He rose. Then—

"Go ahead and get it," he said to me defiantly.

"I'm going to get it," I told him, "and you'll consent to it. After this insult — at Cardozo's — everywhere, I can never live with you again. And I decline to be tied to you. And it was not only about Cardozo's and the others that I sent for you. What I wanted to see you about is money — future money. I must live. You will have to arrange for that—you must arrange to pay me at least one hundred and fifty dollars a week."

I was ready for him. I had written out a statement of what I actually needed for my support. I handed it to him. It was a list of actual necessities, nothing more.

"You see for yourself," I told him, "that it's reasonable. No woman could get along on less."

"I can't pay a hundred and fifty a week," he returned, shaking his head. "I'm not making seventy-five hundred a year—I'm not making half of that now, if you want to know. That's why I had to stop your bills. And this divorce is going to knock my business cold—for a year or two at least. That means even less."

He folded up the statement and put it in his pocket. He picked up his hat and cane.

"What are you going to do?" he asked. "How are you going to arrange. Are you going West?"

I shook my head. I had thought that all out, too. I determined there would be no questionable Reno divorce for me. And I was right.

"I am going to get my divorce right

here in this State," I told him, right here where I live and where you have carried on your pernicious practices—here where we're known. I am going to get my divorce on statutory grounds."

"You haven't got the evidence," he said.

I felt that he watched me closely as he said it. Part of my answer was foolish. For at that time I had no evidence. Think of it—what all the world knew about Dolf—what all his friends knew—what I knew, I couldn't prove. It didn't worry me just now.

"You will furnish the evidence," I told him. "You can see my counsel—you can pay them. You can arrange the evidence in your own way. You know that as well as I do. You're only too glad to do it, probably. See them at once."

He gave me another queer look. I didn't understand it till later.

"I decline to see your counsel," he returned stolidly. "You can proceed in your own way. I don't care how. But I'll not be a party to it. And from now on I decline to furnish evidence. There's a reason—a good reason. Go ahead in your own way, and understand one thing very clearly. I'll pay the alimony that the court awards—no more."

I didn't know his reason then—I learnt it later. Elsie Adams was his reason—I shall have much to say about her before I'm through.

The next day I called on my counsel and had a conference with them. The day after they sent a detective to me. He brought a woman with him. Much as I detested it, all this was necessary. We had an interview behind closed doors, as they say.

"I know Dolf Leffingwell," said this woman. "He's an easy mark. Get him lit up and he'll go anywhere with anybody. I've handled him before—I can handle him now. He likes my line of sympathetic talk. He's always thinking about love in a cottage—and a lot of children—when he's full."

I thought at the time that the woman didn't like the way I looked at her. And I felt that the detective winced a little as he watched me. For he watched me all the time. The woman met my gaze and tossed her head. She looked me over coolly.

"I'll get Dolf Leffingwell," she went on, "nothing easier. How much do I get?"

"How much will you get—from him?" I asked.

There was a sort of horror in her eyes as she looked at me.

"You don't think," she said defiantly, "that I'd double cross Dolf Leffingwell and take his money, too. That's one of the things that isn't done—by me."

We arranged the terms. I had raised some money on some jewels. I paid her half of her fee in advance. But she kept looking hard at a gown or two that I had spread out upon a chair.

"Say," she said before she went, "you and I are just about the same build—know that? Couldn't you stake me to one of your swell Paris gowns? I don't care whether it's a bit rusty. I want the stuff and the cut—that's tony. That always looks tony. I can flash a three-hundred-dollar gown a year or more—and then some, by making over. It lasts."

I looked at the detective.

He nodded, flashing me a glance that indicated clearly that the wise thing to do with people of that kind was to humour them to the limit. I let her pick out one of my worn gowns—but it made me boil to think of her wearing it—my gown!

I watched her wrap it up.

"Let me ask you something," I asked her when she'd finished. "What is it that a man like my husband sees in women like you?"

It was a mistake, of course, but I simply couldn't help it.

"My God!" exclaimed the lady, edging toward the door, "what the devil could he see in *you?*"

V

One evening shortly afterward they called me in a hurry over the telephone.

It was after midnight. The detective and his assistant had tracked Dolf and this woman to one of the hotels on the west side. I was wanted for purposes of identification. I was ready and I went.

When I reached the hotel I was taken upstairs in the elevator. The two men—my detective and another—were waiting in the corridor. They were waiting outside a door. When I came they stepped up to the door and tried to open it. It was locked. They knocked. The door was opened—by the woman. Immediately on our entrance she threw herself into Dolf's arms, screaming. Dolf let her scream—he submitted to her hysterical embrace. She was a good actress, I will say that for her. Then Dolf unlocked her arms from about his neck, and looked at us with a curious smile on his face. To my surprise he was sober—and very pale. I noticed once or twice that he cast a hurried glance about the room. Why, I didn't know.

"Well," he said in measured tones, while my detective took down all he said in a little note book, "Well, you got to me, didn't you? The trap worked. Hotel register down stairs—locked door—everything. No use crying over spilt milk. Now—kindly get out. Leave us alone."

"You're going to remain here—with her?" I demanded.

"Unquestionably," said Dolf coolly, "that's exactly what's going to happen. I'm going to remain here with her. Good-night. Good-bye."

He bowed us out of the room—that queer smile on his face. He locked the door behind us.

"His last remark," said my detective, "clinches the situation. He must be stuck on her."

* * * * *

It was three weeks later that my lawyers asked me to call at their office. They had, of course, brought suit. Dolf had been served with papers. They wanted to talk about alimony. Dolf was there. With him was a girl I had never seen before. She was a very pretty girl, I will say that for her. And she was young. But she was dressed like a dowdy. Dolf caught her by the arms.

"This," said Dolf to me, "is Miss Elsie Adams. She knows all my history. She is a friend of mine. With her I have been open and above board. As soon as your divorce is granted she will marry me. I have brought her here to-day. I want her to see with her own eyes everything that goes on. It doesn't matter to me now what anybody else in the world thinks. She's the only person I consider—the only one whose opinion matters to me. Now, sir," he said to the member of the law firm who was present—Mr. Devon tells me not to mention names—"now, sir, we've settled the question of the counsel fee. How about the alimony?"

"Two hundred a week, at least," said my lawyer.

"Two hundred a month," returned Dolf, "that's flat."

"We can get a thousand a month," retorted my counsel.

"Apply for it," said Dolf indifferently, "the opposing affidavit that I'll file will throw me into bankruptcy—you won't get a cent—!"

"But—you'll get into the county jail," retorted my lawyer significantly.

Dolf shook his head.

"That's just exactly what won't happen," he retorted. "All my plans have been laid against that end. No jail for me. Listen. This is final. I now offer two hundred a month. Take it or leave it. Within five minutes I'll withdraw the offer. Five minutes—do you understand?"

My counsel took me into another room. I could see that he really believed that Dolf couldn't pay nearly what we asked. It made me furious to see how he seemed to be talking on Dolf's side.

"All he's got to do is to earn the money," I explained to him. Beside, I showed him my bills for the past year. He said they didn't prove how much Dolf was making—they only proved

how much we'd spent—how much the bills came to.

We must have proof, he said, as to how much Dolf was making. If we couldn't get Dolf to agree on some amount, then we'd have to furnish proof to the court. Finally we went back to Dolf—and that Adams girl.

"We'll take five thousand dollars a year—a hundred a week," said my lawyer.

"It's an outrage!" I blurted out.

"Yes," said Dolf slowly, "it is an outrage. My offer of two hundred a month is withdrawn. I'm not making four thousand a year now—in the circumstances I really can't afford to take twenty-four hundred out of that—it would only leave me fifteen hundred dollars"—he looked at the Adams girl as he said it—"and so," he went on, in his cool, quiet, hard voice, "I'll change my offer. My wife can take the fifteen hundred and we'll take the rest. I'm willing to pay her $1,500 a year and not a dollar more. When I get to South America I'll add five hundred more to that—she can live on that. She can't get a dollar more—not out of me. This offer you'll take or leave. If you refuse it, I know just what to do. I shall be very glad to inform the court that my wife and this law firm and their detective dickered with Stasie Lewis to set a trap for me—paid Stasie Lewis for it, and gave her a Paris gown in the bargain. I've seen the gown and recognized it as my wife's. You know whether all that spells conspiracy! I'll be glad to put it up to the court. I'll be glad to show the court that Stasie Lewis and I went to the Golconda that evening and registered as man and wife, and were shown into a room where two of my own business associates were already concealed—in the bathroom—and where a clothes closet furnished shelter for another woman of a different stamp—a young woman friend of mine who must know everything about me that goes on. These people know all that happened, heard everything, saw everything. They saw the gown—they heard Stasie Lewis tell me how everything had been arranged. I'll be glad to have this matter aired in court. My skirts are clean. I'll defend this suit with pleasure. And now, it's up to you!"

My lawyer beckoned me into the little private room again. He seemed very much surprised at this attitude of Dolf's. He thought I'd had what he called a gentleman's agreement with Dolf about it.

"We—this firm—" he said, "we—can't afford to go through with this. We can't have our names besmirched—worse, maybe—it's a nasty situation—"

"How nasty?" I asked.

He didn't tell me. He asked another question.

"Does your husband sound as though he told the truth?" he queried.

I told him that he did. I knew Dolf's ways perfectly. Beside, it was the truth. We all knew that—except that we hadn't known that anybody else but Dolf and Stasie Lewis was in that room that night.

"He sounds queer," I said, "I don't like the way he talks."

"He's held this up his sleeve," said the lawyer, "It's too ticklish a thing for us to handle, unless . . ."

We went back to Dolf.

"Mr. Leffingwell," said my lawyer, "we'll discontinue this suit right here and now. We've got plenty of evidence as to your last performances—we'll use that."

Dolf laughed—his laugh was hard—jeering.

"Oh, no, you haven't," he said, shaking his head, "you haven't got any other evidence or you wouldn't have taken the pains to get this in the way you did."

"No," he went on, still shaking his head, "no, you won't discontinue this suit now or at any other time! Your detective and Stasie Lewis stand ready to make a case for you—you know that. Nella can get a divorce on their evidence. And I want her to get a divorce. I want to be free, you understand? I'm very anxious to be free. But I'm not going to be held up for

something I can't pay, and I'm not going to be put in jail. I've caught you in a nice, pleasing little conspiracy—the whole bunch of you—and if it does nothing else, it'll tarnish the reputation of the bunch. And as for county jail. . . . But you'll take the alimony that I offer. And this suit is going on."

"Yes," I exclaimed, "yes, this suit *is* going on. Only," I said, turning to my lawyer, "*and to the name of Stasie Lewis as co-respondent the name of Elsie Adams—this young woman here!*"

The girl turned to my husband.

"Oh, Dolf," she cried, "it wouldn't be true—it wouldn't be right. I've never done anything like that in all my life. My mother . . . !"

She ended up, shuddering, against Dolf. He held her tight.

He looked us all in the face, slowly, steadily—he was very pale.

"You will go on with this suit just as it is," he told us, "just as it is! And you'll accept thirty dollars a week permanent alimony. And you'll get your divorce—and leave me free to marry. Understand?"

"Blackmail!" cried my counsel.

"Just about that," returned Dolf, "I'm being held up. But I'm used to it. I've always been held up—always. That's what I'm made for—to be held up. It's sent me into the gutter—that kind of thing. But I'm through. I've changed. I've got my grip on happiness,"—he held the Adams girl the closer to him—"and I'm not going to let go. I'm going to live."

He looked down at her and she looked up at him.

"I'm going to make something real of my life—something real," he went on, "but don't put any obstacles in my path—not now! I'll have no mercy on anybody who crosses me now. I'm not to be trusted now. I'm desperate." He stared at my lawyer—then at me. "You understand?" he said.

My lawyer changed his tack. He asked Dolf mildly if Dolf would let him put an expert on his books—asked him if he could demonstrate just how little he was making.

"Now you're talking," said Dolf, "I'll do that gladly. You'll see that I'm not making the money. You can't get blood out of a stone."

* * * * *

A week later my lawyers sent for me again. You may be sure I didn't go without having first consulted other lawyers that I knew. They were all of the same mind. They all said that if the husband wasn't making the money, the court wouldn't make him pay. They all told me to make the best of it. They said I was young and good looking—I was prominent—and had my picture in the papers. I could make a good match—I could marry well. They said to let Dolf whistle down the wind. He wasn't worth considering, they felt.

Still without understanding, I obeyed my lawyer's summons. I went to their office to see what they had to say. They had been over Dolf's books. He had told them the truth—he had not been making money. It mattered not how much of a beast he was—if he couldn't pay, he couldn't pay, that's all. That's what they had to say.

But they had other news. Dolf had secured a position in Buenos Aires from a friend of his—on his solemn promise to keep straight. He was to get his expenses down there, and five thousand dollars a year, just what he had been waiting for. As soon as my final decree was entered he would go down there. He had told my lawyer that as a matter of fact I was entitled to a divorce many times over.

"Only," he had told my lawyer, "if *she's* entitled to a divorce, I don't know what *I'm* entitled to. The law doesn't give a husband anything in place of children—the law doesn't furnish any kind of relief against a wife that breaks her husband. But let it go. . . ."

He was going to marry Elsie Adams and go to South America. Meantime he would furnish adequate security to pay me two thousand dollars a year. Two thousand dollars a year. . . .

"A woman in my position almost needs that much a month," I told my counsel.

"Mrs. Leffingwell," said my counsel, "I am talking for your own good. I think this man Leffingwell means what he says. If we don't accede to his terms—and we can't get any better terms, that's clear—the court won't do any better by us. . . . If we don't accede to his terms, he's going to make trouble—great trouble. And to clear themselves, this detective—you know what detectives are—this detective and this Stasie Lewis will turn against you. To do it they'll select a victim—that victim will be you. Net result: no divorce, no alimony—and the possibility of a charge of conspiracy. Divorce in this state is a scandal anyway. You are a well-known woman—your husband is a well-known man. The newspapers here would give their eye teeth for a scandal and a good one. And you know as well as I do that this man Leffingwell is desperate."

I listened coldly to all he had to say. I knew well enough that his statement of the situation was a fair one. But I had something to say.

"I am desperate also," I told him, "as desperate as Dolf Leffingwell. Let him look out."

For I made up my mind then and there.

I made up my mind, first, that Dolf would pay me all the money that I wanted—not what I needed, now, but what I wanted—all the money I desired. He would do that—or take the consequences.

Secondly, I made up my mind that he'd never marry that pink faced doll—that Elsie Adams, with her saint's face, and her dowdy home-made clothes—he'd never marry her. Or if he did, he'd take the consequences.

And the consequences . . . !

VI

I DON'T think I formed any real plan until I began to attend the daily sessions at the trial of Mrs. Delatour across the river. She had killed her husband—a quarrel over money matters, chiefly. He was a brute—he had driven her crazy so she claimed. She had poisoned him—that made it bad for her.

When her trial began I attended every day. I wore a heavy veil. Once they referred to me in the papers as the veiled woman. I think they thought I was to be a witness—or maybe that I had killed Mr. Delatour myself. The next time I went I wore an entirely different costume, and sat far back in a corner—I wore a very light but heavily figured veil. That night the papers said the veiled woman was missing. I went unnoticed among the other women. And day after day I listened to the testimony—and I watched Mrs. Delatour.

She wasn't crazy—not in my mind. No more crazy than I was myself. She was quite pretty, in her way—and very pale and tired looking. But she wasn't as pretty as I am, even now. That was one fact that I tucked away in the back of my memory. And she kept looking at the jury—looking at one after the other—just a plaintive, but very personal, sort of look.

All during her trial I was neglecting other things—for one, my duties at the suffragist headquarters. I was supposed to be there daily to help—yes, and to be ordered about. They even asked me why I wasn't there—they needed my assistance, so they said. I was told after the campaign was over that, notwithstanding my prominence in the movement, it had been claimed I did nothing to help the cause along—that I joined just for the glamour—that I wanted to get into the papers. All I can say is, that they needed somebody to look well and dress well, both on platforms and on horseback and in the Sunday papers. A campaign must be made attractive. I think I did my part. So I kept on in my own way, and part of my way, as I have said, was to follow the Delatour trial in person. I was there at the beginning. I was there all through. I was there at the end.

My own opinion is that she was a cat

—this Mrs. Delatour—and nothing else. Well, she had poisoned her husband. But he was a brute—so they let her off. The day after her acquittal she went on the stage.

And suddenly, I knew what I had to do. I knew something else. I knew it could be done. Unknown to them, unseen by them, I dogged the footsteps of Elsie Adams and my husband. They were careless—carefree. They had nothing to fear. They never knew that I was about. Once I overheard them talking in a restaurant. Dolf was fuming, fretting on account of the delay.

"You don't understand what it means to a chap who's going to start fresh," he told her, "who's got his whole life to retrieve—to live over. It's the whole thing. It's salvation. It means even more to me than if I hadn't gone through—things. It's glorious. But I'm afraid—afraid of what can happen before. . . . !"

"Dolf," I heard her say—in that sure, good smug way of hers—how I hated her! "Dolf, dear, there's nothing to fear. Nothing to be afraid of. We're going to keep on living, both of us—and the time draws nearer and nearer. I know all about you, Dolf—and you know all about me. What's past can't trouble us. There are no spectres—nothing can come between us. And Dolf"—yes, I could hear her say this, too, "Dolf, I'm just as impatient as you are, Dolf—just as much—and maybe the least bit more."

It was then that I knew it must be done—that I must do it—that there was no other way.

Already I had good reason—as good as any one could want—to hate my husband. The insults heaped on me at Cardozo's and the other places—the pittance of two thousand dollars a year that he was paying me. . . . I had good reason. . . . I had many reasons. But all the reasons—all the drunkenness—all the women Dolf had had—all faded out before this intolerable thing. Dolf was going to South America with this pink-faced bride—this Elsie Adams. Yes, I knew the type—the born mother. She mothered him—she would mother his children. Love in a cottage—I knew the kind. . . .

Not if I could prevent it. And it came to me then and there—and I gloated over the knowledge—it came over me then and there that I had the power to stop it. I made up my mind to one thing—never should Dolf hold this girl in his arms as his bride—never should she get him. I made up my mind to that. The divorce suit should go on—but that wouldn't help him. Let it go on—it remained with me to snatch from them their ecstasy at the very instant that they reached out eager hands to clutch it. Why not? I hated him—I hated her. She—that was going to spend the money that was mine—going to bury herself in South America with my husband—rear his children . . . No!

I knew what was to be done and how to do it. I waited until two weeks before my final divorce decree was due. You may say that I could have accomplished my object by stopping the divorce. I had thought that all out. I was tangled up with lawyers, with detectives, with Stasie Lewis—but I was not so afraid of them as I was of Dolf's threat that he would have what he wanted—that he would ride through. I knew that he would ride through. And I knew that the time must come when he and the Adams girl would take their happiness, divorce or no divorce. They were infatuated with each other—so infatuated that Dolf wasn't drinking any more. And he was looking young and strong again. No, as I said to myself over and over again, the divorce must go on—it was too late to stop any of us—we were all riding through. Only—I knew that I should ride through first.

I settled down into seeming satisfaction . . . waited.

I bought the revolver in a city fifty miles away. I told the Clerk I was a Red Cross volunteer going to France, and needed one. He was presumptuous.

"I'd like to be wounded about three

times a day around your emergency hospital," he told me.

He told me that because he admired me—I could see it in his face. He admired because I was pretty. I knew that—felt that keenly. It was going to help me—it would stand me in good stead.

Nights later I stood outside Elsie Adams' cottage. The window was open. Dolf was there. He was showing her a copy of the final decree in my divorce suit—he had got it certified on his way out that afternoon. They were exultant—I could see it, feel it. Nothing stood between them and the great happiness they'd waited for . . .

The girl stepped for a moment out of the room. I shot Dolf in the back while she was absent. Then I tossed the revolver into the room through the window. I went back home. They arrested Elsie Adams for the crime. Three days after her arrest they released her.

Tory Corner mud is very red and clayey. I had brought some into the house—my own apartment. It seems to have been a simple matter for them to trace the purchase of the revolver. And I had thrown it through the open window—my big mistake.

It was Inspector Breen who took me to the county jail and locked me up. And it was Inspector Breen who had picked up that bit of dried red mud from the surface of my white bearskin on that night when he and Mr. Bryce first came to my apartment.

The county prosecutor had a private interview with me. And I talked—talked freely. I knew what to say. It was not for nothing that I had followed closely three big murder trials in as many years. I knew just what to say—just what not to say. My mind had been a blank—I told him so. I talked about everything that had happened since my arrest. I talked about matters three weeks old. So far as the intervening period was concerned, it was I who asked the questions—he who answered them.

I had picked my counsel long ago—he was the biggest lawyer in the county. I sent for him now. He was away. One of his partners and one of his assistants came up to the jail to see me. I shall not mention names, nor shall I describe these men. Mr. Devon tells me it is better so. They got the prosecutor to put us into a small bare room. When they were left alone with me, they made sure no dictaphone machine was concealed anywhere about—beside which they had the prosecutor's word for it that we would not be overheard. They closed the door and locked it. We sat down at a little table and put our heads together. One of the lawyers glanced at me very earnestly.

"You must tell everything," he said, "we can't do anything for you unless you do."

I nodded.

"I killed him," I said, "just after I'd seen her in his arms. I—I couldn't help it. Something came over me."

They looked at each other. One of them nodded.

"A married woman," he said, his eyes hopeful, "sees another woman in her husband's arms—of course she shoots, why not?"

The elder of the two smiled. He shook his head. "Having deliberately bought the revolver a week or so before. Having deliberately lain in wait. Having the knowledge further that she was not his wife, but that she was divorced, and that the divorce was obtained by her own will, on her own petition. And," he went on, mercilessly, it seemed to me, "that she had sought the divorce because her husband's treatment of her had made it impossible for her to live with him—because she had lost all affection for him. Knowing that she's free—knowing that she can re-marry if she wants to. But knowing also that he is taking advantage of this same decree—and will re-marry—what happens? She has a brainstorm and shoots him with the pistol she's been treasuring for weeks. It won't go down. It's no go!"

"Mrs. Delatour got it over," said the younger man.

"Not on *these facts*," returned the other.

I stopped them.

"I wish," I said, "that Mr. —— that your partner had come here. It was he I sent for. It is he I want to see."

For their talk worried me. I didn't understand then why they had said these things. It looked to me as though they thought I might have no defence—and I knew I had a defence. I had listened to every shred of the evidence at the Delatour trial. I had improved on her devices. She got off. I knew I must get off.

The elder of the two men smiled at me.

"Of course, Mrs. Leffingwell," he said, "a woman of your high intelligence can well understand why we indulge in this discussion in your presence. We do it for your own good. Here and now and in this room we must evolve the theory of our defence. To delay it is dangerous. For from now on you must think and talk only along the lines of this defence. We've got to get you off. We're going to get you off—we'll do it, never fear."

He was silent for a moment—silent and staring steadily at me. He touched his younger associate on the arm.

"Look at her," he said, "just as she is. Isn't she a picture? No jury'll ever convict a woman who looks like that. All the feminine appeal in the world is bound up in her."

The other man drew his breath sharply. I saw the colour creep up into his face. His eyes glowed.

"I get you," he murmured. "I get you. She's better than Mrs. Delatour—a thousand to one. The fatal gift of beauty. You've got it, Mrs. Leffingwell—it's sure to pull you through. . . ."

"What," demanded the other man, "have you told the prosecutor? Nothing, I take it—good!"

But I had told him things, and I repeated them now.

"Godfrey," exclaimed the younger man, "the very thing. Your own idea was right. We take off our hats to you, Mrs. Leffingwell. No brainstorm—no insanity to prove. Her mind a blank? Why a blank? Easy enough. It's due to the cumulative effect of years of brutal treatment—of humiliation—of terror. At last it unnerves her. She buys the pistol without knowing it—the excitement of her divorce has been too much. She tracks Leffingwell without knowing it. She shoots him without knowing it. Insanity—nothing. Besides, she doesn't want to take a chance of being tied up in an asylum. This was mental aberration—aphasia—that's all. The symptoms mostly subjective—most of them dependent upon her own testimony. Her own description—they'll believe it. Aphasia is the trick. And the cause of it the brute she killed. That—and the woman that she is will pull her through."

Their manner irritated me—insulted me. It seemed to me as though they regarded me as some printed argument, or the stenographic minutes of a trial.

"Gentlemen," I said, "gentlemen—I want you to understand something, as between ourselves. I want you to feel that the killing was justified—I had to kill my husband—had to kill him, after all that happened. . . ."

And I told them how he had stopped my credit at the stores—reminded them of his dastard trick in cutting down my alimony.

"And I couldn't," I went on, "have that smug-faced Adams girl get him—I didn't care so much about the other women—but that girl—I think you understand. . . ."

The elder of the two held up his hand as though to quiet me with the assurance that they understood everything.

"Don't talk, Mrs. Leffingwell," he said, "talk to no one save to my senior partner—he will see you here this afternoon—to no one save him, to my associate here, and to myself."

VII

When the day of my trial arrived, I knew and felt that no prettier woman than I had ever stepped across the threshold of that dingy courtroom. I

could feel the gasp of admiration as I lifted my veil and shook hands with my counsel—as he bowed me to my seat.

"Make yourself very easy," he whispered to me. "Nothing goes on, as you perceive, until you reach here—nothing can transpire in your absence. It is your constitutional right. You are the one important individual to be considered. The prosecutor is afraid of you—don't be afraid of him. Public sentiment's behind you. Take your time—all will be well. These are our experts in the front seats there—you've talked to most of them—the big men of the state. In a minute they'll begin to call the jury."

Almost instantly they began.

"Ellen T. Walker," called an officer after sticking his hand into a box and bringing out a little slip of paper. "Ellen T. Walker—there she is."

I touched my counsel's arm.

"Not *women* jurors!" I exclaimed. "They don't have women jurors here?"

My counsel smiled easily, and swung his eyeglasses in the air.

"You ladies *would* have suffrage," he returned, "and suffrage in this State has brought us women jurors. With the privilege of voting comes the duty of the voter."

"But I don't want women on the jury," I protested. "I want men—young men, at that."

He looked at me understandingly.

"Don't fear," he said, "we both want the same thing. We'll try and get just what we want. There's lots of time."

The prosecutor was asking Ellen Walker questions. I remember only one—it was the last question that he asked her.

"Mrs. Walker," he said, "where a wife has been accused of murdering her husband—where do your sympathies naturally lie?"

It seemed to be just a general preliminary question leading up to some detailed investigation as to Ellen Walker's state of mind. She answered the question, looking steadily at me.

"My sympathies," she said firmly, "are always with a wife who's been abused. But," she kept steadily looking at me the while, "notwithstanding that I should find a verdict according to the evidence and nothing else."

To my surprise the prosecutor sat down.

"Satisfactory to me," he said.

Everybody was surprised when my counsel excused Ellen Walker—to the spectators evidently her reply to the prosecutor had seemed so favourable to me. My counsel excused her, much to my relief, but in so doing he used up one of his peremptory challenges—the law allowed him only six. He used the other five to excuse five more women jurors. At the end of the second day the jury box was filled. There were four young men, two middle-aged men, and one old man, a bachelor. The other five were women jurors—a situation that we couldn't help.

I was on the witness stand four days. The prosecutor's cross-examination took up three—it was terribly gruelling. I am told that most of the questions were dictated overnight by the New York alienists that he'd brought in to testify. When I stepped down finally I fell, in a dead faint, into my chair. . . .

My counsel told me later that at the moment of fainting I looked more beautiful than ever . . . he told me not to worry . . . told me I was a brick, that I'd stood up under the cross-examination like a major . . . that we had them going.

But there was something in his tone that jarred. He leaned over toward his colleague, who sat next him. I leaned over, too, and listened.

"I don't like the attitude of those five women in the box," he said.

The next thing that I remember they had found me guilty . . . !

The women did it—I know the women did it. And I have now less than twelve hours to live. After that . . . !

Mr. Devon has just asked me—and he wants Miss Bates to put my answer down—what my first recollections of Dolf are—whether he was a dissipated man before I married him? And I an-

swer that I think not. Of course I could see nothing wrong with him then. But Dolf was a bad man in the end—he became a bad man—that is God's truth! Mr. Devon knows that. That is a fact—a fact I have the right to tell.

Mr. Devon asks again—he wants to know whether I can recall my honeymoon—with Dolf. My honeymoon—he wants me to concentrate on that—to think about it hard. The day I married Dolf and all the rest. The first few weeks—he wants me to think—to think hard about it—to remember. . . . My honeymoon . . . good God, yes! . . . It all comes back to me . . . my honeymoon. . . . Oh, Dolf! . . . Oh, Dolf! . . . Oh, God!

THE WEAVER OF WORDS

By Amanda Benjamin Hall

HER garden-spot was hidden, quaint and queer,
By hollyhocks more fortunately tall
Than I, the child who clambered to be near
And sunned me like an apple on the wall,
And heard close by the intermittent fall
Of water from the cool and lisping mouth
Of some rare Inca fountain of the south.

Like blue dreams worn in saintly women's eyes
Forget-me-not spread carpet for the trees,
And fairy-frail and wonderfully wise
All day there was an epic on the breeze,
And shadows stirred to sudden ecstasies,
The while I watched her making magic there
With slow sweet drift of petals on her hair!

MEN and women are very different. A man's love is a woman's meal-ticket, a woman's love is a man's pastime, a man's whims make a woman smile, a woman's whims make a man commit murder. . . .

A MAN'S mother is his ideal; his sweetheart is his dream; his wife his awakening.

TO love is to doubt. To marry is to be sure.

PUNISHMENT

By June Gibson

ONCE when I was a little girl I fell in love with a dirty Italian who played a hurdy-gurdy in the streets.

As he held me in his arms I gazed upon his grimy face in adoration.

My parents learned of my infatuation and placed me in a convent.

When I returned from the convent I married a professor of ethnogeny, who was sedate, scrupulous and unromantic.

We have a lovely little daughter.

I have become very fond of my husband.

He has never discovered my secret.

* * * * *

To-day I found my lovely little daughter entertaining an organ-grinder in the garden.

As he held her in his arms she gazed upon his grimy face in adoration. . . .

THE PRODIGAL

By Louis Untermeyer

ABASHED and blundering, I have come back
To force the liberal bounty of your love;
To ask for what I never had to lack
Or take too little of.

The brazen, desperate demands
Are halted by your clouded eyes;
Your cooling and compassionate hands
Choke my well-meaning lies.

Your wounded faith, your lavish love,
The glittering heights I cannot reach,
Those bright nobilities reprove
Me more than any speech.

Softly, your silence, like an unrung bell,
Breaks into gentle music, and the black
Barriers lift as, from a transient hell,
I have come back.

THE PERPLEXITY THAT CONFRONTED BELDEN

By M. L. Meeker

I

SHE had a little way of tasting things she ate, with her head on one side and the faintest suspicion of a smack, which he had once found utterly adorable. Then there was that little mannerism of hers, of trailing her laughter at the end in an upward, questioning note, like that of a petulant child.

Perhaps he had found her most absurdly lovable in what he teasingly called her "seeress air." When she had something she very much wished to tell him she would don an air of abstraction and answer him in monosyllables, all the while staring past him, her beautiful dark eyes seemingly fastened on mysterious and absorbing visions. If he asked her point-blank what was weighing on her mind, she would give a little start of surprise and say, "Nothing at all—why?" But tender and elaborately casual remarks on irrelevant subjects would inevitably elicit some bit of news, so absurdly inconsequent, that no one else would have given it a moment's thought. At such times he used to feel like kneeling to kiss her little feet, and staying there to worship for ever. There was no one in the world so whimsically, so ridiculously adorable as Lucia!

Once, in the beginning, he had told her half-seriously that he had married her just because of those three absurd and delightful mannerisms.

"Men have married for less," she had said, and laughed. And her laughter trailed into a plaintive, upward note, like that of a petulant child. Then he had smiled and held her close and decided that never before had there existed anyone so kissable as Lucia. . . .

II

TO-DAY, as he watched her tasting her fruit cocktail, her dainty head cocked to one side like a bird's, he was ashamed of the sudden ugly irritation which swept through him. He tried to analyze this emotion impersonally. After all, if Lucia wished to taste her food before she ate it, was it not a trifling matter, one which in no way affected him? Though it seemed to-day that he had never noted quite so audible a . . . yes, it was the only word to call it . . a smack! In fact, on anyone else, it would seem atrocious manners. . . .

"It's good," decided Lucia, and popped a cherry into her mouth with the air of a naughty child gulping a sweet.

A year ago he would have smiled worshipfully at her across the table. Now he regarded her impassively. While a companionable demon within him whispered maliciously,

"Affectation—pure affectation!"

It soon became apparent, from Lucia's mysterious and withdrawn gaze, that she had something on her mind and that she wished him to ask her about it.

"Don't give her the satisfaction!" screamed the demon coarsely.

Belden, watching his wife as she sat opposite him, serenely unaware of the turmoil within him, wondered what she would say if she knew. To his overwrought nerves her dainty epicurean ways were exquisite refinements of torture. He told himself fiercely that he would rather have her use a toothpick or leave her spoon in her cup than flow, as she did, from one dainty pose into another.

His lips spoke commonplaces which his exasperated senses did not heed. Lucia responded in monosyllables, her dark eyes gazing dreamily into space. She was freighted with information highly exciting—to Lucia. The perverse demon within Belden took a grim satisfaction in an elaborate ignoring of her abstraction. At dessert it became unmistakable that he was not in the least interested in discovering her thoughts. She withdrew her eyes from the far spaces, regarded him a trifle coldly, and said:

"Oh, Belden, I had such an interesting conversation with Anne this morning. . . ." Here Lucia tasted her ice doubtfully, decided it was worth eating, and continued: "I know you told me not to show it to anyone, but when you hear what she said about it . . ."

"About what, if I may be so bold as to ask?" said Belden with elaborate courtesy.

"About your new story, 'The Peacemaker,' of course. I know you won't mind a bit when you hear . . ."

"Do you mean to say," Belden interrupted savagely, "that you showed that to Anne—to Anne, of all people?"

"Don't use that horrid tone," Lucia remonstrated, shuddering delicately, "you know how I hate unpleasantness—why, yes, I read it to Anne this morning. We were talking about psychology, and I simply couldn't resist showing her the part—don't you remember?—where the man carries the woman who fainted into her bedroom. Anne thought your description of the way his mind works, as he stands looking down at her, remarkable. I have never seen her so interested in anything before. Of course, she insisted on reading the whole story to see how it ended. She said . . ." Lucia hesitated a trifle.

"Go on. She said . . . ?" prompted Belden grimly.

"Well, she said to tell you that she considered it a masterpiece, and that her entire sympathy is with the man. And I must say I'm surprised at her for taking such an immoral point of view," concluded Lucia a bit primly.

"Perhaps you misunderstood me," suggested Belden, with a fine edge on his voice which Lucia should have recognized, "when I told you I had particular reasons for not displaying that story to any of our friends; when I told you that I was even publishing it under a pen name, so that no one but you would ever know it was mine?"

"Oh, but I didn't misunderstand at all," Lucia explained volubly, misled by his quiet tone. "I was positive that you wouldn't mind Anne. She's such an intimate friend of ours. And then she's so broad-minded, and interested, you know, in things . . . in things," Lucia finished a bit lamely under her husband's angry gaze, and gave a little laugh, a laugh that trailed at the end. . . .

"Now," shrieked the demon triumphantly, "this is too much—isn't it . . . isn't it . . . isn't it?"

"I see," observed Belden in open scorn. "So because Anne is broad-minded—a word of offensive meaning, if any, and for which the originator should be strung up—and interested in 'things'—I suppose I understand the sort of 'things' you mean—you abuse my confidence, give away my secret to the one person who should not know it and is bound to repeat it . . ."

"But no, Belden, she promised . . ."

"Yes, you promised, too. Before withdrawing 'The Peacemaker' from publication, I can only say that from now on I shall make a point of keeping my affairs to myself, and away from the prying eyes and nasty minds of women in general!"

Overturning his chair as he arose, Belden stalked out of the room, giving

himself the vulgar satisfaction of slamming the door behind him as he went.

III

He had a more sound foundation for righteous wrath than Lucia could suppose. There were just four people in New York, he computed, as he seized his hat and cane and walked distractedly down the street, who knew that at Anne Peyton's dance, a month ago, Anne had fainted in a convenient and secluded corner, and that he had carried her to her room. Those four were Anne's butler, old Mrs. Scranton, Anne and himself. The butler did not matter; he was thrill-calloused, after years in the service of "our best families." As Mrs. Scranton (who was near-sighted) had not told so far, she probably would not think of the matter again, unless, he thought bitterly, it were recalled to her by a somewhat significant story ascribed to him, which she would undoubtedly amplify with lurid details of her own. Anne might tell, but probably would not, for many excellent reasons.

Belden alone knew how surprisingly she had revived, after a few moments, on that evening a month ago. But he wondered soberly how many others were aware of the existence of that easily overlooked and astonishingly accessible little outside door, placed so cunningly between the two large windows in Anne's boudoir. Had Lucia ever seen it? Obviously not, he decided.

However, under present circumstances, there was only one thing to do —to withdraw "The Peacemaker" from publication and so avert an ever-threatening calamity. With Lucia and Anne bosom friends, and both apt to impart his pen name (in confidence) to any number of intimates at any time, he would never have an unharassed moment. He smiled wryly as he considered returning the sizeable cheque which he had received only two days ago and had already spent in anticipation.

As a matter of fact, there had been no reason for concealing the truth of the affair from Lucia from the beginning. As Belden had bent over Anne as she lay inert on the bed, he had ardently wished that Lucia might have been present—in spirit—to admire his indifference. Though Anne was admittedly beautiful, she had never attracted him. There was lacking in her, for him, some touch of glamour, some graceful *esprit*.

But as he watched life and expression quicken in her lovely face, he had contemplated, quite dispassionately, all the thoughts and emotions that might, in such a situation, throng to a man who was in love with Anne. He had been rather proud of them, he remembered—these impassioned imaginings of an imaginary self. Swinburne could have played with them in exquisite word melodies. Maupassant might have made with them another masterpiece. It was at this point that he had considered that he, Belden Sanford, might fit them, if not into a masterpiece, at least into a pretty story, one to cajole some harassed editor.

So meditating, he had made a rather pre-occupied and unsympathetic exit, after ascertaining that the patient was well enough to ring for her maid. He had not even remembered to glance again at the secret door, which on that night had been left ajar. Anne must have thought him a dull sort. . . .

And now she had read "The Peacemaker"!

He was both amused and enraged as he realized that she would, of course, ascribe to him all the bizarre emotions he had described in such detail. The message she had sent him by Lucia showed she was not displeased. She "sympathized with the man!"

Belden groaned as he recalled his highly-coloured ending.

It was Lucia, and Lucia alone, who had brought this situation upon him! He quickened his pace in pure vexation. The most exasperating part of it all was that his wrath must perforce turn in upon itself. It was now too

late to tell Lucia the truth, while Anne would regard a true explanation as insulting, if she believed it at all. Lucia should be made to feel his displeasure, and there was no way of impressing it upon her. Anne . . . Here the perverse demon within him whispered alluringly. Belden stopped, hesitated. . . .

"By Jove, I might as well!" he muttered, and went into the first telephone booth to call up Anne.

IV

As he waited for Anne, his state of mind was curiously complex. He had telephoned her on a sudden unworthy impulse of revenge against Lucia. Anne had seemed surprised, though glad, to hear his voice. When he had asked, "By the way, how is your mysterious door?" she had sounded grave, had said she must see him—couldn't he come to tea? Belden, who immediately had an uncomfortable vision of eavesdropping maids and disagreeable little sandwiches, hastily reversed the invitation.

Now, while he waited, he was heartily regretting what he had done. He felt that he was making a fool of himself, that Anne, secretly amused, was going to talk to him "sensibly"—unbearable thought! Worst of all, he found himself possessed with an overwhelming desire *not* to make a fool of himself before Anne. He suddenly and passionately wished Anne to like him, to talk to him about the little door. . . . Strange to say, he did not now think once of Lucia.

When Anne arrived, however, his dismal forebodings were immediately dissipated. He felt exhilarated in a way he had not been since his marriage. He regarded Anne with new vision, and found a new Anne, a bewitching blonde person with friendly blue eyes which he could not admire extravagantly enough. An old predilection for blondes swept over him again with sudden conviction.

He wondered why he had never noticed before how smartly she dressed. Her dark frock, the soft white lace at her bosom, the sable fur she wore, fastening high against her chin, but permitting a glimpse of her smooth throat beneath, all intrigued and stimulated his imagination.

At Anne's suggestion, they had tea at a hotel known to most people for its tea room alone. It is a dim, perfumed place, full of cosy corners and cushions and whispering couples. Belden had always thought it extremely silly, a schoolgirl's dream of adult licence. Today, however, his very curiosity and uncertainty threw a romantic glamour over the situation, so that he failed to resent even the confidential air of the waitress who took his order.

As they seated themselves, Anne leaned forward to slip her fur back. As her shoulder touched his he found himself tingling like a boy. A warm, flower-like fragrance emanating from her seemed to confuse his mind with languorous images. He bent towards her. . . .

"Anne . . . Anne, dear," he murmured, and wondered curiously at his emotion as he spoke.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon him —He was in love with Anne!

"Belden, you must be careful," Anne whispered smilingly, "not here . . ."

"No, not here," he repeated fondly.

The future seemed bright with romantic and daring adventures. He pictured to himself how kind he would be to Lucia, how forbearing with her foolish little ways. . . . He regarded Anne glowingly, marvelled at her grace as she lifted her cocktail to her lips. . . .

Then suddenly his blood seemed to freeze in his veins. A sickening sense of calamity enveloped him as he watched Anne tasting her cocktail coquettishly, with her head on one side, and the tiniest suspicion of a smack. . . .

"It's good!" she decided, and laughed softly, a laugh trailing at the end into an upward, questioning note, like that of a petulant child.

"Why didn't you show me 'The Peacemaker' yourself?" she cooed

gently. "I would have understood. Oh, that night at the dance, I thought—Belden, I thought . . ." She relapsed into silence, her lovely blue eyes gazed dreamily past him into space—it was the look of a seeress!

Belden knew his cue too well. She wished him to ask her what she was thinking of. He stared at her in horrid fascination. Even from the midst of his shipwrecked sensibilities, he was convinced that Lucia did it much better. . . .

* * * * *

And now Belden is confronted with an odious and insoluble problem—Does Anne copy Lucia, or did he marry Lucia because of three hateful and exasperating mannerisms originated by Anne?

JILL, DO YOU REMEMBER?

By Harold Crawford Stearns

JILL, do you remember
How in wintry weather,—
Snowy, wild December,—
We would fare together.

To the little grill,
Always open wide,
Where was room for Jill,
Jack—and none beside?

Jill, do you recall
When the Spring, aquiver,
Woke each waterfall,
Valley, hill and river,

And we went a-wending,
Pals of Fancy Free,
Ours for just the spending
All eternity?

Do you, too, remember still
All we planned and dreamed for, Jill?

TO forget: that is to be young. To remember: that is to be old.

RECOMPENSE

By John Hamilton

I

THERE was an awkward smoke-blackened factory.
Behind it was a ridge of amethyst hills and the bay, glistening like a giant diamond in the sun.

II

A child recoiled from an ugly, wriggling cocoon.
Out of it came a gorgeous butterfly, gold and scarlet.

III

He talked to a lank-limbed, thin-haired, grim-voiced woman.
She had a beautiful sister.

SOUTH WIND

By Hortense Flexner

THE South wind walked on Second Street,
The South wind wild and gay,
I crossed the door with flying feet,
The dusk was grey,
I ran as I would run to meet
My love this day.

The South wind bent to touch my hair,
I laughed outright;
There were strange gardens in the square,
And fields of light;
But O, I found not anywhere
My love this night!

JUDY O'GRADY

By Lilith Benda

I

THERE was something about them which suggested the lord and lady of feudal days. Enid Brooks' fair hair, severely parted and coiled high, gave the effect of a coronet. When they appeared in public, always she leaned upon her husband's arm with a certain helplessness, a certain aristocratic droop that only emphasized her queenly air. Her little, wistful mouth smiled a smile gracious and yet in no way cordial. Beneath fastidiously arched eyebrows, big brown eyes looked out at the world with an austere and unfriendly quality in their gaze. Whether in timidity or repugnance, she seemed always to be shrinking away from things, to be holding herself aloof from existence.

To her pale beauty there was an incorporeal note. She was one of those frail, ethereal women whose air of helplessness, coupled with a chill patricianism, establishes so tremendous a hold over men—just the sort a bachelor, who had ranged inordinately about, might acclaim the lady of his choice when a hankering for a family heart sounded its infallible presagement of middle age.

Many a pretty face had fallen reproachfully at the betrothal announcement. Many a head wagged in doubt. The idea of Napier Brooks turned benedick and sternly faithful to the vows he had so eagerly and light-heartedly taken moved his friend to bantering mistrust. Speculation was heavy upon the subject of an inevitable Lorelei. Wagers were made as to when she would appear. For, despite his forty years and steel grey hair, Napier Brooks, prone to peccadilloes and adept at the game, downed in the lists of affectional tourney every new aspirant that challenged his prowess. Tall, sunbronzed, clean-limbed, he had the irresponsible smile of a boy and clear blue eyes that lighted naïvely at sight of a pretty woman. With an innate courtliness and a disarming deference of manner, it was part of his charm ingenuously to take for granted the conqueror's rôle that was always conceded him. And everyone believed that, once the novelty of the thing wore off, his wife's cold beauty and fragile aloofness would become irksome to a degree potent to impel him toward the light lapses of bachelor days.

But to those who had doubted, gradually it became apparent that he had put foibles behind him, and remained rigorously true to the conjugal engagements. More, and what especially astounded the mistrusters, far from unbending before her husband's volatile charm, Enid Brooks, with a tenacity of will incongruous to her fragility and helplessness, unquestionably dominated him.

She became the leader of a set that allowed of no compromise even with the most prudent of free-and-easys. She took a fancy to the Brooks family estate on Long Island, with its formal gardens, colonial mansion and big, cold rooms, and established herself there with never so much as a sojourn in New York for the winter season. Her entertainments were few, formal and somewhat dreary, and yet rarely were her invitations rejected.

Even Mrs. Frayne—Mrs. Julie, as the pretty, sparkling, black-eyed little widow was known to her friends—for all her yawns and pouts appeared at Enid's impressive dinners.

"Salutary self-torture, like a Lenten *devoir*," she sighed, and curbed her spirits, suppressed her laughter, assumed a meek and chastened mood.

Enid's dinners presupposed chastened moods. Neither dancing nor bridge were permitted, neither cigarettes nor cocktails. Rare old vintages were charily served, but never a sparkling wine.

"All effervescence barred here!" Mrs. Julie, who liked champagne, once murmured experimentally into Napier Brooks' ear. But he only looked at her askance and changed the subject.

And just as by virtue of a delicate chilliness of soul she dominated her guests, so everything about her home reflected Mrs. Brooks' personality. The house was decorated in chaste greys and pastel blues. She admitted no furniture more opulent than Heppelwhite. Her husband's well-beloved Renoir was frowned upon and relegated to his study, together with the Chinese vases, glorious *sang-de-bœufs* and mirror blacks and *clair-de-lune* whites.

When mildly he protested, "I find something nasty in Oriental things," she murmured, arching her fine eyebrows, leaning with a gracious dependence upon his arm. And the vases gave way before the old Chelsea she loved.

Even her servants reflected Mrs. Brooks—all quiet, low-voiced, well-mannered, well-trained. There was Jennie, for instance, a treasure among maids.

Stoical, inscrutable, silent and swift-moving, something about this Jennie's deliberate gesture and stately bearing suggested the hieratic poise of East Indian women. She spoke rarely, but in a low, musical voice that seemed not to tally with her plebeian utterances—with her "ma'ams" and "ain'ts" and "was you's." She smiled rarely, a slow, grave, lazily lovely smile. Her eyes were big, and placid, and grey, the rosy iridescence of her skin meetly tempered by a scattering of freckles. She had the hair of an Irish peasant, black, wavy, coarse, but with a satin sheen to it. Tall and supple, deep-chested and broad-shouldered, she exhaled a certain docility and protectiveness that made her, for all a dangerous loveliness, an ideal handmaiden and a subservient foil for Mrs. Brooks' mignon perfection.

"I'd be lost without you, Jennie," her mistress would murmur graciously, a little proud of her success with this girl who had come to her, eighteen and uncouth, and developed into so competent a servant. No former maid had dressed the fair hair so elegantly, had coiled it so deftly into a sort of pale gold coronet. No other maid had been so apt with the menthol stick and *eau de cologne* that banished an occasional headache.

And Jennie, moreover, displayed a commendable instinct for self-improvement. By degrees "ma'am" became madam, and the "ain'ts" less frequent. She even attained a feeble smattering of French, understood what her lady meant by *malaise* and *migraine*. Her finger-nails were daintily manicured. There were times when she abandoned the regal bearing, which, after all, was a shade too self-assured for her station, for a somewhat ungainly imitation of Mrs. Brooks' aristocratic droop. She appeared to revere her mistress and to blend her humility with a maternal solicitude.

The maternal streak, indeed, was very apparent in Jennie. A characteristic gesture of hers betrayed it—a quick, eager outstretching of the hands, as if to receive something long denied her. And then, too, she was always singing, so softly as to be scarcely audible, a little lullaby:

"*Toora loora looral, toora loora li,*
Toora loora looral, hush, now don't you cry,
Toora loora looral, toora loora li,
Toora loora looral, that's an Irish lullaby."

Enid would find herself humming the tune. At times she heard her husband whistling it.

Napier Brooks whistled a great deal, whistled loudly, whistled blithely, as if to express his contentment with the rôle of country gentleman and happy husband. After five years of marriage he remained as buoyant and carefree as ever. For a certain period, some two years before, there had been indications of approaching dullness and middle-aged gloom. He had neglected his horseback-riding, moped at the fireside during the partridge season. There had been a puffiness about his chin, a grey note to the healthy brown pallor, an unmistakable hint of a paunch. But after a few months the old gleam returned to his eyes, the whole-hearted ring to his laughter. The scoffers and doubters were forced to pay tribute to Enid Brooks. For once, a rake had been reformed.

And then all of a sudden came the blow. At last a lapse! At last a Lorelei! . . . It was Mrs. Julie Frayne.

II

It was twilight of a summer day, the hour when Napier Brooks generally returned from his afternoon canter over the estate. Before a narrow mirror the maid Jennie was adjusting a crisp white cap, when a peremptory ring summoned her to her mistress' room. With the detached, deliberate air that made all her movements, however swift, seem premeditated and slow, she tied her apron and slipt through the halls. She was paler than usual to-day, and what little colour was in her face faded away when she entered Mrs. Brooks' room, and saw her mistress standing before her.

The lady wore a dark grey dressing-gown, rigorously opaque, high of neck, long of sleeve, and hanging in loose folds to the floor. Her face was a greyish white, the little wistful mouth drawn into a tight line, the big brown eyes ablaze and staring in a dazed way at a menthol stick she held in her hand.

The girl uttered a little exclamation of concern, patted a bed-pillow invitingly.

After a long silence, with her eyes never wavering from the menthol stick, Mrs. Brooks spoke. Her voice was strangely guttural and low.

"I shan't dine to-night. Indisposed."

"Very good, madam," Jennie answered, with a faint, frightened gasp.

"Is Mr. Brooks in the library?"

"Yes, madam, he's just after coming in—er—" A flush of pained embarrassment suffused her cheeks. "I mean —I mean he returned a little while ago."

"Ask him to come here at once."

"Yes, madam."

After she had closed the door, the vague alarm in the girl's eyes became sheer terror. She ran lightly through the halls crooning, for all her fright, the little song so constantly at her lips:

"Toora loora looral, hush, now don't you cry—"

Napier Brooks was deep in the evening papers. So silently and swiftly did the girl approach him that he failed to look up even when she was at his side, started at her low "Beg pardon, sir," smiled his brilliant smile.

"Yes, Jennie?"

"Mrs. Brooks wishes to speak to you right away, sir."

He arose at once, with the scrupulous response to his wife's every wish which he unfailingly displayed. Something on the girl's face, though, made him pause as he was turning away.

"Anything wrong, Jennie?"

"She seems awful angry, sir."

Across the man's face a sudden alarm flashed. His lips tightened. But it was characteristic of him not to hesitate at the prospect of an unpleasant encounter. He hurried from the room too quickly even to note the shamed flush mounting to Jennie's forehead, to hear her apologetic murmur:

"I meant to say—she seems very angry, sir."

The concern upon his face deepened into astonishment when he opened his wife's door. Half-way across the room he stopped short with a muttered "damn!" For Enid was stand-

ing just as Jennie had left her, her eyes fixed upon the menthol stick which had fallen to the floor. She looked very young, very helpless with her fair hair simply parted over the pale, pure face. And this fragility and ethereality rendered all the more sinister the livid, oddly twisted mouth and great, blazing eyes. She seemed desperately to attempt to conceal, with a display of icy anger, something within her torn by grief, mortally wounded, cruelly outraged.

When her husband entered, she raised her hands to her throat, twisting and untwisting the little frail fingers. Her eyes closed, and the deep, purple shadows beneath them stood out like ugly bruises. She tottered a little, but when Brooks started toward her, immediately shrank away as from something unspeakably vile.

"There isn't going to be a divorce." The man winced at her unnatural, guttural voice. "There isn't going to be a divorce. I don't believe in divorce. But I am leaving your house to-night, and a separation suit will follow. The —the notoriety will be unpleasant, of course, but it would be casting aside the principles I hold most sacred not to face it. I believe that evil-doers must be exposed and punished, not protected."

Methodically she continued to twist and untwist her fingers. While she spoke her gaze had been fixed on the floor. Now slowly she drew herself up to her full height and raised eyes, glittering like the eyes of a madwoman, to her husband's face. "A trull's a trull, whether she be your trull or the footman's. A trull's a trull, and I mean all the world to know this one for such!"

Napier Brooks looked shamefaced and uncomfortable. And yet about him there hovered a suggestion of the old irresistible, irresponsible Napier Brooks of bachelor days. He appeared impatient to have done with this unpleasantness, a little shocked at his lady's unprecedentedly forcible vocabulary, and ready for a humorous confession, a laughing repentance, ready to be forgiven. His expression served only to goad his wife to cold fury. Beneath her breath she shot out her next words:

"I have all Julie Frayne's letters to you!"

On the instant his face went white. A harrowing dread widened his eyes. And the wife's thin lips curled in malignant satisfaction as gradually his face assumed an aged and harassed look.

"I have all Julie's letters to you," she repeated more loudly, more harshly. "And they shall be read in open court. They shall be printed in every newspaper in the land. . . . A referee, sealed papers, no scandal—that's the usual procedure, I believe, isn't it?—but I mean this scandal to be blazoned throughout the country. You and your —your—you and that thing shall pay a price for your filthy little affair!"

"You couldn't do that, Enid." Hardly above a whisper he brought out the words, slowly, timidly, as if with difficulty. "You are too—too fine-fibred for that sort of thing. A woman's good name was in my keeping. If, by a criminal carelessness, I've placed the power to disgrace her in your hands, surely you wouldn't stoop—you shan't stoop to exposing her like—"

"Oh, shan't I?" Her voice rose to a feeble scream. Beads of perspiration stood out on her forehead. And the black shadows beneath her eyes enhanced the maniacal glitter there. Strangely, enough, too, her every word and glance manifested the outraged love that was spurring this fragile woman to vulgar, irrepressible fury.

Mid-Victorian to her fingertips, a wife of the old and desuete school, this abrupt discovery of a gambol among forbidden paths threw her whole existence into chaos.

"Oh, shan't I, though?. . . This afternoon the blow came. Life means nothing now. The world's gone black. And in the face of it all you think only of your—of Julie Frayne's good name! Quite by accident I came upon the letters. . . . Oh, but you were careless! Criminally careless—true. And

you shall pay for your carelessness! I mean to have our accounts very evenly balanced, Napier Brooks!"

Now hard, dry sobs shook her. Like a demented creature, she continued to twist and untwist her fingers until the joints cracked, to pinch and pull the fair flesh at her throat until bruises stood out livid against the whiteness.

"I chose you—from among all the others—you with your forty years and your evil reputation. I forgave the things that had gone before—trusted—believed—the promises—the vows . . . Senseless gabble! Low lies! I gave you myself, my all—my all—" She lingered over the melodramatic phrases that rise to the lips of reserved beings under the stress of an emotional outburst—"my all—my youth, and my life, and my love! In return I thought that at least you'd offer a—a square deal!"

She paused for an instant, shuddered and continued even more shrilly:

"That that low thing should come to my house as my guest, as my friend—and that you, my husband, whom I—that the two of you, in my house—under my roof . . . begin a flirtation that's resulted in shame—in degradation—filth! The squalor of it all! . . . The filth! The filth!"

"Enid, you'll have yourself ill."

As she reeled, he caught her in his arms, but with a quick twist of her body she freed herself and, laughing softly like a distracted creature, ran across the room toward the room beyond.

On the threshold, abruptly she stopped, arrested by something that caught her eye there. A low wail, like the cry of a wounded animal at bay, escaped her. She darted beyond his vision, and a moment later reappeared in the doorway. Her face was even more distorted than before.

"You cur! You common thief! Pick the lock—of my desk," she went on, incoherent between sobs. "Pry open my desk . . . like a common burglar!"

Her husband raised his arms at his sides and let them drop helplessly. "Enid, you're mystifying. I never—"

"Like a burglar," she cried on. "Pick the lock—pry the desk open—steal the letters, Julie's letters, my letters—cad's trick, pry open the desk—Julie's letters. . . . All you think of—her good name—steal what belongs to me—low thief—steal Julie's letters—"

She lurched forward and would have fallen on her face had he not sprung across the room and caught her in his arms. . . .

And of a sudden, with a ludicrous abruptness, it was all over—the hysteria, the indictments, the strife. Precipitant upon her discovery that she was thwarted in her project of retribution came that breaking point of her outburst which would have resulted in a swoon but for her husband's arms. For Napier Brooks' arms about a woman put him immediately at an overpowering advantage. The old gallantry and self-assurance seemed to return to him as he encircled the slender waist; a gallantry mollified, however, by deferential courtliness. And it was no longer harassment nor alarm, but a very real solicitude for this woman brought back from the point of insensibility that kindled in his eyes. Dazed, bruised, in a sort of trance, she made no effort to release herself. Her head was thrown back across his arm, her plaintive white face upturned to his. And Enid's plaintive white face upturned to a man's put her immediately at an overpowering advantage.

Gradually the dry sobs subsided. Gradually a little colour broke in upon the deathlike pallor. She blinked her eyes and looked at him with a quaint shyness, as if recognizing him as her husband for the first time that day. She raised her hand and let it brush his cheek before it fell back inertly. Like a tired child she sighed a heavy sigh. And the wistful, thin-lipped little mouth smiled faintly.

Her very languor, as she lay there in his arms, seemed to irridiate the terrible power of this woman, the relentless power of her weakness and helplessness, of that delicate patricianism all the more apparent now for the in-

sane outburst that had died away into a sort of numb serenity. As he smoothed the hair back from her damp forehead, Napier Brooks seemed unequivocally to surrender before this power, and Enid to read the surrender in his eyes, to accept it, to absolve him, to bask a little at the prospect of unwavering worship from this big, handsome man whom every woman regarded with inviting eyes—unwavering worship potent to obliterate the insult he had inflicted upon her wifehood.

He carried her to the bed, laid her gently down.

"Enid," he whispered, "won't you just this once more trust me, dear? Accept my word that this sort of thing will never occur again? . . . Just this once more, dear?"

A frail hand sought his. The thin lips smiled.

"The incident's closed, Napier. We will never speak of it again. We'll begin all over."

He sighed with relief, smiled his brilliant, caressful smile. But for the veriest fraction of a second an expression crossed his face that made him look like a creature delivered from a red-hot purgatory, only to be thrust into an icy hell.

After a moment she rubbed her forehead, uttered a poignant moan.

"Mind ringing for Jennie, please?"

Her eyelids drooping wearily dismissed him. On tiptoe he walked from the room. And in the hall he encountered the maid, Jennie. Silent and swift as ever, with that effect of deliberation, she was coming toward the room—"*Ra loora looral, that's an Irish lullaby*," she crooned under her breath, and never raised her eyes as he passed.

III

An hour later he looked into his wife's room, where she lay just as he had left her, redolent of *eau de cologne* and asleep from exhaustion. He tiptoed away, lit a cigar, and set out on his customary after-dinner stroll.

It was a clear, cool midsummer evening with a half-moon sailing high in the sky, and the air sweet with mignonette. Now and again came an owl's plaintive cry, blending with the croon of frogs and the crickets chirping. The occasional sound of an automobile horn in the distance only intensified the quiet here. An evening with a throbbing aliveness to it that cried out for youth and rose-hued adventure. . . . Napier Brooks heaved a dull sigh. Tonight there was a middle-aged sag to his shoulders.

He walked out beyond the formal gardens into fields, all fragrant in the evening dewiness, of new-mown hay. Again he sighed his heavy, tired sigh, tossed away his cigar and turned back, his head lowered in so deep an abstraction that he failed to see a woman running lightly toward him, a woman in black with her apron and frilled cap gleaming silvery white in the moonlight. She was close to him when she outstretched her hands as if pleading for something relentlessly withheld. She was at his elbow before her soft "Beg pardon, sir," aroused him.

"Ah, Jennie!"

At the sight of her his face fell, his eyes shifted. And meeting his discomfiture her brow wrinkled in perplexity, a deep flush spread over her face, and into the clear grey eyes there crept a look of pain. Awkwardly she shifted from foot to foot. And her proud bearing became a clumsy imitation of Mrs. Brooks' patrician droop. When she spoke it was in a tremulous, fluttering voice just above a whisper:

"I just followed you, sir, to give you these. It's the letters—nine of 'em, all of 'em, all in the grey envelopes with the purple seals, all just like they were when they were taken from your table drawer, sir . . . all of 'em here, sir."

"Ah!" A vast relief shone from his eyes. He took the packet greedily, examined it, slipped it into his pocket. "How did you manage to er—obtain them, Jennie?"

"When she was in her bath this afternoon—Mrs. Brooks, sir. Between

fetching her crystals and passing her things, I picked the desk lock open with a nail file. It was awful bold, but I knew things was—were going bad for you. . . . It's taking a liberty to ask, but will you see to it that they're burnt to-night, sir? You're absent-minded, and careless about such things. You run awful big—very big—risks, and the next time we might be out of luck."

He nodded as if in dismissal. And reluctantly she turned away, only an instant later to approach him, smiling her grave smile. The big grey eyes looked a little reproachfully into his. "Maybe for a few weeks, you better play it cosy—oh." Upon her face the flush deepened with this lapse into pantry patois. "I mean, be discreet. Tell her not to write any more letters, sir. Too risky. . . . But there's a baker's shop on the main road only a little ways from the house where the servants do their 'phoning, and get their calls, seeing as Mrs. Brooks don't allow it. If she'd call up there, Mrs. Julie—that is, Mrs. Frayne, sir—if she'd call up there evenings and ask for me, I could take messages any time. I'm to be trusted, sir. You can tell her I'm to be trusted."

"Can't quite make you out, Jennie." Puzzled and embarrassed, the man met the eager entreaty on her face.

"I'm to be trusted," she repeated.

He shook his head. "Thanks, Jennie, but there won't be any need for that sort of thing in the future."

And he laughed a somewhat shamefaced, boyish laugh that seemed to invite sympathy and encouragement to sustain him in his resolution.

But Jennie started indignantly. Her timidity and embarrassment left her. Vigorously she shook her head.

"Oh, I suppose she made you promise never to do it again, didn't she? Oh, but can't you see you mustn't keep no such promise? Buck up, sir! Why, you'd get old!' Can't you remember how it was eighteen months ago come July—January, remember? And the house party here for the skating. You was—you were getting old; your collars were too tight, and the vests—waistcoats—didn't fit. And the lines, sir, and the wrinkles!"

Her voice was no longer a tremulous whisper. It rang out rich, and clear and sweet. Again, unconsciously she outstretched her hands in that strange, yearning, maternal gesture which seemed a plea for permission to solace and gladden. She had stepped very close to him, peering through the gloom into his face when of a sudden the awkward slouch that imitated Mrs. Brooks became again a queenly poise. Perhaps it was a responsive gleam in his eyes, perhaps only the witchery of the dew-laden night air, but of a sudden all the clumsiness and restraint and alarm that seemed to enmesh her, fell away into a glad abandon. Her eyes lighted. Her lips curled. Her shoulder grazed him. A low, jubilant cry rang out. She threw her strong young arms about him, pressed her lips to his, stood so for a long, still moment, motionless save for that exultant tremor, silent save for a glad, inarticulate murmuring.

"Boss!" she whispered at last, "Oh, my boss, but it's good to be—like this—again!"

There was a stirring in the branches overhead—nothing more than a night-bird or a bat. And yet Brooks started nervously, averted his head. For a moment he had held her eagerly, as if comforted and heartened by the simple innocence of her. But with that stirring in the branches she became no more than another phase of a problem already replete with exasperating intricacies. As his arms fell away from her, she looked up quickly.

"Do you ever miss me, boss? I mean just once in a while? Do you ever get lonely for me like you used?"

"Often, Jennie." But the beseechment on her face shamed his complacent smile and glib lie.

She laughed softly, let her head rest against his shoulder, relapsed into service slang.

"That's a lot of noise. I mean—well, you don't miss me, so don't say you do.

When it's between you and me there's no need to twist the truth, dear—sir."

Still he remained unresponsive and out of countenance. The look of pain deepened in her eyes.

"Would you like," she went on, turning her face away from him. "Would you like to give me notice? I mean—well, it must be a kind of a nuisance like this, having me around, always reminding you—and you having trouble enough with her in there. They must be lots of worry to a man like you, sir, —women must, what with their 'Do you love me's' and 'Do you miss me's.' Don't know what made me act that way. Guess it must've just been talking to you again—and the night-time and all."

As half-heartedly he slipped an arm about her, she continued with more assurance:

"Don't believe I'd ought to give notice just yet, boss. I'm thinkin' I'd better stick around for a while and sort of —sort of look out for you. Because you're careless with letters and things. You'd give yourself away. Mrs. Brooks won't never leave you. And you mustn't keep your promise. There's trouble coming 'less everything's managed smooth. Somebody's got to watch out for you and—" She broke off abruptly, faced him again. "I only seen her once or twice. What's she like, sir? Mrs. Julie? Mrs. Frayne?"

The man smiled. It was the boy that still lurked in him, the ardent boy who, without a thought of giving pain sought a trustworthy confidante, that answered.

"Cunning little creature, Jennie. Always laughing, always cheering one up. Funny, frothy, little thing. Mop of black curls tumbling to her waist. Dainty and devil-may-care. No dreadful depths, no devastating refinement of soul. Just skims through life. . . . Of course, you don't understand what I'm saying, but—well, she's a cunning little thing, Jennie."

An owl hooted. As if from an immeasurable distance came the sound of an automobile horn which only accentuated the evening tranquillity, with the dewiness, and the night breeze, and the scent of new-mown hay. In the moonlight the girl stood, straight and tall, swaying a little from side to side. Under her breath she was humming the little lullaby, "*Toora loora loora, toora loora li.*"

Once again she outstretched her hands in her strange madonna gesture. She was in a reverie. She appeared to be listening, and waiting, and pleading for something that without protest she had put behind her. For a full minute the man looked at her with a certain compassion that was not as much compassion as regret, and not so much regret as respect. At length, "How old are you?" he asked sharply.

"Twenty, sir."

"And what are you going to do, Jennie? You can't—dear child, you can't just stay here and—er—look out for me. I've noticed these last few months —I've seen how without a word, without even asking for an explanation, you went back to the 'sirs' and blotted out that one year. It isn't fair to you, girl, and I can't allow—"

"What am I going to do, you're asking?" she broke in, "why, if you say so or no, I guess I'll just stick around, sir. . . . There's still the man keeps the garage in the village, if that's what you mean. But I'm not thinkin' of marryin'. You can't be seeing men like that, you know, after—after you've known a gentleman."

All her pride in him shone from her eyes.

"Boss, don't you worry about me. Why, all the months it was going on I kept thinkin' to myself, 'Here's something you'll remember, here's something you'll always have to remember,' I knew it wouldn't last, sir—not with a gentleman! I was always waiting for a Mrs. Julie to come along. . . . You remember, I always called you boss? And you'll always be my boss, just that, sir. I couldn't ever call you Napier. It—it would've been—" She swallowed hard, blinked her eyes, turned away her face. The clear voice fell

to a whisper. "It would've been kind o'—kind o' like callin' God by his first name."

Lightly she swayed toward him, leaned against his shoulder, a sort of apology for this momentary emotional display in the reassuring pat of his arm.

"What am I going to do?. . . Just stick around, so's you don't get in another mess. And when you get on to the tricks of it—then I'll give notice, sir."

With a very genuine tenderness, Napier Brooks took her hand. "*C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas la guerre*," he murmured.

She stood very still, humming her song. A peculiar alertness stole into her face. The brow wrinkled.

"That is," she said at length, "that is. That is."

"What, dear? What is?"

She nodded with a little chuckle.

"That is—that is. *C'est*—that is."

"Oh." His handsome face laughed into hers. For the first time that evening he displayed no discomfort, no embarrassment in her presence. "This is like old times, Jennie—the French lessons. . . . *Magnifique*," he pronounced slowly. There was something reminiscent and sweet in her nervous little laugh, and shake of the head. "*Mag-ni-fique*," he repeated, making the g hard.

"Magnificent!" she exclaimed, all eager smiles. "That is magnificent."

"*Mais*—but—"

"But that is not . . . *Ce—n'est—pas*, it is not . . . and the last word?"

"War."

"That is, or it is, magnificent, but that is, or it is, not war." Her brow still wrinkled, she looked up into his face. "What's it mean, boss?"

Then he drew her to him, put his arm around her, spoke very gently.

"Jennie, there's war ahead for a girl like you, dear—battle after battle. You've got to learn to fight. You can't just stick around and—er—look out for me. You're twenty. There'll be others. There's life ahead for you—and battles. It's very lovely of you, but I can't have you—"

"Now!" With a finger laid lightly against his lips, she checked him. "Now you're talkin' like an oldish man, sir! You mustn't do that. Buck up! Listen to me, now—listen. . . ."

She hesitated for a little, as if she were searching intently for words of assuagement that would still his misgivings once and for all.

Presently a low, glad laugh rang out in the stillness. Her face, over which a silvery iridescence played, lighted with a new, serene conviction. Rapt and sweet, trembling a little in the moonlight, she met the shamefaced tenderness in his eyes. And when at last she spoke, each homely phrase was fraught with persuasive eloquence, sounded a clear, triumphant assurance.

"If there's to be others, it's got to be gentlemen like you. Once it's been a gentleman—you can't have it—no one else. Maybe there's others ahead, and maybe there isn't. I don't know. I'm not thinkin' of that. . . . I'm thinkin' I've got something to remember always. I'm thinkin' I can't never be a lady, for all the grammar books, and French lessons, and manicures in the world. And I'm thinkin' I can look out for you better in my own common way. I'm thinkin' I'll always be proud because—eighteen months ago, in January, remember!—it was me who took hold of you when you was—were going stale, when the collars were too tight, and the vests—waistcoats—didn't fit. Going stale for a little laughing and brightness, what with everything so prim and proper and glum, and you listening to every 'you mustn't do this' and 'you mustn't do that' from that chilly one in there! I'm thinkin' you were my first, and you owe your first a square deal. Mrs. Julie ain't—isn't important. It'll be another soon. But I'm thinkin' you won't keep that promise. You're going to let me take messages at the 'phone in the baker's shop. . . . You're going to buck up!"

She was radiant, her eyes starry and scintillant in the darkness. Her laugh-

ter sounded musically. Before he could put in a word, she went on:

"Oh, I know the stuff they'd all say, them that creeps with their faces to the ground, no matter if it's in the scullery or in the parlour. 'The woman pays' they say, and 'what a price the woman pays' and 'men are brutes' and 'life is cruel.' . . . A lot of noise! You hear it with long words in the masters' rooms and I hear it in the kitchen, what with cook dronin' away nights, and His Nibs—that's the butler, sir—whinin' out what a wicked place the world is for girls, and sneakin' behind the pantry door to snicker, and grab at you as you pass. I know what they'd say about you, taking a girl, and a good girl, and droppin' her. . . . How you was a brute to make her turn up her nose at the thought of a home of her own, and a man of her own. And I'd tell 'em something if ever they started, sir! I'd tell 'em a thing or two!"

The exultation of creatures who live in their memories swept over her face.

"It was me that led you on, eighteen months ago come January—remember? With the house-party here for the skatin', and the big fires goin', and you mopin' in your study, and never raisin' your eyes when I fetches you the hot toddy that day—remember? Me with my heart poundin' wild fer fear, but smilin' brazen-like, and sidlin' up, and chokin' out, 'Buck up, boss.' . . . Remember? . . . That was the start, and this is the end. And I'm proud now like I was then. And it's you that's made me proud. And I'm going to stick around, and look out for you for a while. Else it wouldn't be a square deal, boss."

A nod of finality topped her words, a laugh, a sigh, a handclasp. Straight, tall, jubilant, she stood beside him. Her frilled cap, silvered by the moonlight, shone like a coronet. For a moment they looked into one another's eyes. There was something about the two which suggested the lord and lady of feudal days.

"A home of your own, and a man of your own, and your head in the air with nothing to hide, and children—and a victrola and such. . . ." As if for the last time she were evoking the silly ghost of a silly life-dream, she whispered the words. As if for the last time she were watching and waiting, and pleading for something all the more precious for its insignificance, something that without protest or regret she had put behind her, she half-outstretched her arms, and let them fall gently at her sides. She stepped close to him, caught his hand, brushed his cheek with soft lips. "What's all that, once it's been a gentleman?—Burn the letters. . . . And buck up, boss?"

Before he could speak, before he could stop her, she had slipped away among the bushes, silent and swift as ever, humming her little song.

IV

For a full five minutes Napier Brooks stood motionless. Then he lit a cigar, breathed deep of the evening fragrance, strolled leisurely toward the house. About half way, the path twisted, so that for a few yards it ran close to a low, stone wall that skirted the Brooks estate. The man's eyes chanced upon a brightly lighted little baker's shop across the road. He paused for a moment, threw back his shoulders and walked briskly on, whistling at the top of his lungs Jennie's "*Toora loora*" lullaby.

THE CARRIER OF THE GREAT BARROW SOCIAL PLAGUE

By Randolph Bartlett

I

DR. EVERETT SELWYN threaded his course through the tea-tables on the veranda of the Country Club. Georgina Graham noted his approach, noted his gravity of demeanour, noted that his scarf-pin had been jabbed rather viciously into place so that it did not punctuate with its accustomed nicety the convolutions of his tie. So she gracefully subtracted herself from the chatterers and met him half way. They found an unoccupied table and sat down.

"I need your help again, Georgina," the doctor remarked.

"You didn't need to tell me," the sapient Georgina replied. "What is it now? Has Mrs. Harrison decided to have another attack of nervous prostration or does Mrs. Hollister want a fancy diagnosis for over-eating?"

"Much worse. Cicely Holton, my sister's only child, is coming to visit me."

"Oh!" The monosyllable expressed Georgina's understanding of the problem that had made the correct placing of a scarfpin an insignificant matter.

"Yes. Alice is off to Florida and Cicely doesn't like the South, so they compromised and she is coming here."

"Can't you explain, and head her off?"

"The explanation would sound so silly, and would seem like an insult to Cicely, as well as a confession of my own helplessness. No—all we can do is take every precaution."

"Perhaps through Cicely we can get at the bottom of the whole situation."

"A doctor never operates on his own relatives," Everett reminded her. "Frankly, I don't like it. The mere fact that the child has enough independence to stick out against going to Florida is bad, to begin with."

II

THE peril attending the visit of Cicely to her uncle was no less real to him because it could not be exactly stated, but rather more so. Vague apprehension interlaced the social fabric of Great Barrow's *elegantes* as a neglected basting thread marring the perfection of a gown otherwise immaculate. It was an apprehension that any individual of that splendid vicinage would have refused to define—would, in fact, have denied existence with that same heat in which the Californian disowns earthquakes, the Central American revolutions and the policeman vice crusades, vehemence being the megaphone of their fear.

So while Great Barrow, as a total of several hundred aristocatic souls, was silently tremulous with what-will-happen-nexts, the separate entities composing that colony, had they deigned to recognize the situation at all, would have melodized in unison, "Nothing can happen to us."

Indeed, it seemed preposterous to think of anything untoward happening in Great Barrow. The very plan of its existence had been evolved with such scrupulous care that Utopia might have voted itself slipshod by comparison. A few gentlemen with capital suf-

ficient for any purpose, and with motives high enough for magistrates as of Plato's ideal republic, had acquired a large tract of land and invited colonization by such families as could afford it, and could submit escutcheons unblemished socially and commercially. It was near, yet not of the city. It was a democracy of aristocrats, a commune of *elegantes*.

Into this rule of law anarchy had intruded. All the protective power of tradition and *savoir vivre* had been ineffective against certain manifestations of unrest. Had there been but one incident or two, Great Barrow might not have considered its ideals in peril. But the phenomena were recurrent and alarmingly frequent. Still, the habit of aristocracy, the conviction of self-sufficiency, is persistent, so Great Barrow trembled in silence, repudiating that which it could not explain.

As nearly as the menace could be stated in a phrase, it amounted to a revolt of the ingénues, an unvoiced declaration of independence by the débutantes.

Eleanor Harrison had eloped with a chauffeur, which was bad; married him, which was worse; and refused to leave her two-rooms-and-bath apartment in town to return to the parental chateau, which was unspeakable.

Mary Partenton had run away from home, and, having funds of her own, had set herself up in a studio and was studying some foolish kind of art.

Gladys Colville had ignored the obligations attending her engagement to Bernard Landville, and when pretending to go to the city on shopping trips, had been seen in public places dancing with obscure persons.

These were typical instances. There were many more of the same. When these nonconformist young persons were properly rebuked, they showed not the least sign of shame or repentance, nor would they give any promise of future circumspection. They would request their parents to wake up and stop being mid-Victorian. Like Paul, they took pleasure in their infirmities, though possibly not for the same reason.

Dr. Selwyn was one of the few members of the colony who attempted to study the situation as a whole. Being an iron-grey widower with no children, he was able to think of it in impersonal terms. And being extremely wealthy, even for a fashionable physician, his services were constantly in demand by persons who could not afford to pay less than the most extortionate fees for the most trivial services. Thus he was the confidant of most of the Great Barrow families, especially when nervous prostration seemed the only decent step a *materfamilias* could take when disaster descended upon her household.

Contrary to precedent, he did not regard his responsibilities lightly, but sincerely desired to be of ultimate value to his community. Try as he would, however, card-indexing the escapades of the ingénues, he could discover no correlative facts leading to a central point of departure from conventionality. These little adventures in life annoyed him, not because he deplored them, but because he could not explain them. They were social phenomena in a circle with which he was intimately associated, and his scientific mind insisted that they must focus somewhere.

Even Georgina failed him—Georgina the dependable—Georgina who, it should be known, diagnosed most of the imaginary illnesses of Everett's patients, without even entering the sick-room. She was not quite thirty, and had not married, possibly because her sense of humour was too acute. When men tried to make love to her she always laughed at the wrong time, which is fatal to romance. But being beautiful in a clever way, and clever in a beautiful way, she was invariably popular. She possessed the rare faculty of agreeing with people in a manner that implied her conversion from an opposite opinion. Her own views she respected far too highly to scatter them broadcast among persons who could

not possibly appreciate them. If Georgina argued with you it was a sign of unmixed approval.

Yet Georgina was as completely mystified by the Great Barrow epidemic as her friend. She was a great favourite with the younger girls, and something of an oracle to them, and because she was so thoroughly correct this was encouraged by the mothers. But, intimately as she had known Eleanor Harrison, for example, that young person had never hinted at the possibility that she might elope with a chauffeur. So she frowned a little at the idea of Dr. Selwyn passing on to her responsibilities concerning his niece which he felt were too serious for him to assume in person. Consultation was one thing—taking full charge of the case was entirely different and undesirable. Yet she could see that this was what was in his mind, and protested.

"I know it's an imposition," he admitted, "but you see my dilemma. All I expect, of course, is that you will keep an eye on the girl, chaperone her in a way, and sift out any disturbing influences."

"Oh, is that all?" Georgina inquired with a laugh. "Well, I don't know why I should do this, but I will. I don't mind saying, though, that you're going to give me a bad time of it."

"Perhaps I can simplify it, or make it more interesting," the doctor said. "I have a new theory which, by process of elimination, seems the only logical one. Did you ever hear of disease carriers? Well, they are persons who simply radiate disease germs in every direction without having the malady themselves. People with whom they come in contact become infected, and a whole epidemic may result, while the cause of it all may be entirely innocent and unconscious of being the source."

"And you think the same thing may be possible socially?"

"Just that. Here we have a small community, carefully guarded against social infection, and yet here we have the epidemic. The cause must be located in Great Barrow. If we find the carrier we solve the problem."

"If your niece were not involved the search would be fascinating. But I think I will just try to keep her insulated, and we'll do the hunting afterwards, when she has gone."

There seemed nothing more to be said, so they looked out over the beautifully manicured hills and listened to the gabble of par and bogie. Here were two score individuals to whom this exquisite landscape was nothing but a series of sunken tin cans into which one rolled a little rubber ball and passed hours bragging of the fact.

Everett felt that he and Georgina were strangely isolated, and wondered why this isolation, which had brought about a fine friendship, had never ripened into anything more deeply fixed in their emotions. He looked at her, she sensed his glance, and turning toward him, gazed a moment, and then laughed.

"Not by the moon, 'the inconstant moon,'" she chuckled.

"Georgina," the doctor declared impressively, "one of these times I'm going to find you in trouble, when you don't feel like laughing, and then I'm going to ask you to marry me."

"And when I can no longer laugh," Georgina stabbed back, "I'll marry a doctor."

III

A FEW days later Cicely arrived. With her first casual inspection Georgina approved and was distinctly relieved. Cicely was nineteen, simple and direct, but best of all, was innately aristocratic. Conscious superiority was written upon every act and word, the superiority that disdains snobbery and that does not need to hold itself aloof from anything or any person, because it is supremely convinced that it commands respect from others, having learned to respect itself. She was a slim Minerva.

Georgina's task assumed a more pleasant aspect than she had anticipated.

With this girl she could be more comrade and less chaperone. In Cicely she could see reflected a certain similarity to herself, which made the progress of friendship simple and natural. With much the same perspective they looked upon the shallow inconsistencies which comprise so great a proportion of the routine of existence, especially among the self-limited *elegantes*, and with the same gentle irony dissected friend and foe. To be with Cicely constantly for the month or two she was to visit her uncle no longer appeared in the light of a cold duty, but rather in that of a privilege. The task of guarding her from the Great Barrow plague was a labour of love.

They became intimate. They spoke much of themselves, finding the subjects more interesting than any other. They exchanged theories. They even asked each other searching questions.

"Why don't you marry?" Cicely asked Georgina one day, almost abruptly.

"Why should I marry?" Georgina replied, with a laugh.

"Because, just as Napoleon's grenadiers all carried marshal's batons in their knapsacks, every woman carries a wedding ring in her heart," Cicely persisted.

"Perhaps. It may be that I am suspicious of emotions. They either frighten or amuse me. Emotions prevent you from being yourself, from ruling your own existence. I've loved a man or two, in a way, and have had a good deal of trouble concealing the fact. But in the end I've been glad that I kept tight hold until the wave broke. Because in no case has the man been strong enough or intelligent enough to suit me in my saner moments."

"Then you don't believe in love?" Cicely asked.

Georgina looked up at the girl quickly. It was the first alarming note. But Cicely's voice was calm, and her glance steady. Georgina breathed again, and scolded herself for indulging in silly fear.

"I believe in so many kinds of love that I couldn't enumerate half of them. But there are a few kinds that I don't intend to indulge in, and they seem to be the only kinds that lead a man toward marriage. And the kind of men who are led in that way don't appeal to me as matrimonial possibilities."

"I see," Cicely mused. "You think a husband should be selected—not just accepted."

"Exactly. Consider his virtues when he is absent, and if he doesn't make you feel uncomfortable when he is present—take him."

Further discussion of the best manner of approaching marriage was interrupted by the arrival of the golf instructor. Georgina cared nothing for the game, but Cicely was anxious to learn. It was part of her boundless energy and curiosity about everything. Golf interested many people she knew, and she wanted to know why. So Georgina trailed along, nonchalantly poking her ball around the pasture, while Cicely concentrated upon the finer points of address and swing, accepting as a matter of course the respectful praise of the instructor. As Cicely became more and more adept, the game palled upon Georgina, and she begged off, watching indolently from the veranda as Cicely and her teacher made the round. One day the girl returned to the subject of marriage.

"I have been thinking over what you said about selecting a husband," she said, "and I believe you are quite right. Women are too prone to drift into marriage, or be swept into it on impulse. I shan't allow myself again to become interested in a man until my reason permits it."

Georgina was pleased. She felt that she had done her work well, that she had been able not merely to inoculate her friend's niece against the Great Barrow fever, but had, at the same time implanted in her a good, substantial philosophy of life that would be of vast service to her in future.

This gave her more time to think about herself, and she began to wonder

why it was she did not practice what she had been preaching. Following her own prescription, Dr. Selwyn would be a perfectly satisfactory husband, and she knew that the least encouragement would bring about a proposal. But there was that about him which aroused the strongest phases of her character and added to her feeling of self-sufficiency. She believed she would never marry anyone else, but could she ever so subordinate herself as to marry him? She could not understand why the question was so difficult, because she did not understand that, not yet having touched her emotions, he could not vitalize her principles and make them operative.

A week passed, a week of the pleasant placidity of self-contained Great Barrow, and then the crash came. One afternoon a great bulldog of a roadster snorted furiously up the doctor's driveway, insolently tearing at the finely-surfaced road and stopping at the door with a jerk and a screech of emergency brakes. A dusty youth hurled himself at the bell and shouted at the astonished maid:

"Where's Cicely?"

Selwyn heard the roar and came to reinforce the stammering girl.

"She's out just now," he said. "What's the trouble?"

"Where is she? I've got to see her at once, before it's too late," the youth blustered, while the maid discreetly withdrew.

"But, my dear young friend," the doctor said, calmly, "why all the excitement. Before what's too late?"

"Are you her uncle?"

"Yes."

"Then read this," and the youth produced a much-crumpled letter.

It was addressed to Mr. Charles Fanning, and informed him that all was over between them.

"I have found a most wonderful friend," Cicely wrote, "and she has convinced me that it is a great mistake to trust our emotions. You know, our friendship has been altogether too emotional. I am very fond of you—yes, I am still—but I am determined that this shall not influence me in the least. I shan't allow myself again to become interested in a man until my reason permits it. And I may add that I am even now considering such a person. He is very fine and strong, and although he is not one whom my family might approve, I shall not permit that to influence me, as you may believe, when I cast aside the more important consideration of my emotional feeling for you."

The doctor could only gasp.

"What have you been doing with her?" Fanning demanded.

"Nothing," Selwyn protested. "That is to say, I haven't been seeing a great deal of her myself. I've been rather busy. But she's been in safe hands—er—well, that is to say—why, good God—*Georgina's the carrier herself!*"

"Carrier! What do you mean by the carrier?"

"Never mind. Come on in and brush up a bit. They'll—that is, Cicely'll be back soon. They—she's gone to some sort of tea fight. There's no immediate peril, my boy. My advice to you is to take a bath and be looking your best when she arrives."

The cyclonic car was trundled into the garage, and Selwyn led the anxious Fanning to the renovating department, to make himself presentable. The ardent youth admitted that he and Cicely were not exactly engaged, but that was because they did not believe Mrs. Holton would have agreed to any formal decision for a year or so, but it was taken as a settled thing.

"But who is this other man she writes about?" Fanning demanded.

"Haven't the least idea," Selwyn assured him. "It can't have progressed far, I'm certain."

IV

He escaped from the perturbed youth and fled to his study. He wanted to be alone with his discovery. So it was Georgina who was planting the seeds of discord in the sacred fields of Great

Barrow. But how? The letter gave some clue, but still it was difficult to understand. He smiled as he nursed the thought that now he had reached the bottom of the mystery, though he had not completely analyzed it.

A little later Cicely arrived, and Georgina with her. Fanning stayed in the drawing room while the doctor imparted the news of his arrival.

"Oh, that's not fair," Cicely exclaimed. "He's spoiled everything."

"Tell him yourself," the doctor replied. "He's in there."

"I won't see him alone," she insisted. "You and Georgina must be present. Georgina, don't go back on me now. You won't, will you?"

"Why, certainly not, dear child," the wondering Georgina reassured her. "But what is it all about?"

The doctor looked sardonically at Georgina, and she returned his glance with utter bewilderment.

"It's just that I've been taking your advice about emotions," Cicely said plaintively.

"My advice! Good heavens! Have I been giving advice?" Georgina exclaimed.

"Apparently you have," said Selwyn. and led them to the impatient Fanning.

"Cicely!" the ardent youth shouted, and rushed toward the slim Minerva.

"Charley!" she half shrieked back at him, and met him half way.

"'Plucky lot she cared for idols when I kissed her where she stood,'" the doctor intoned.

The demands of emotion having been temporarily satisfied, something else crept back into the memory of Fanning.

"But, Cicely," he demanded, holding her off at arm's length, "what's this about some other man?"

"Yes," the doctor, added, "what have you two been up to?"

Cicely hung her head prettily.

"Well, when Georgina said we oughtn't to marry a man we loved—"

"I didn't say anything of the sort," Georgina interrupted, snappishly—for Georgina.

"Well, it was something like that, anyhow. So I began to think seriously about men and their qualifications, and the golf instructor was so clean and cultured and everything"—and Cicely's voice trailed off indefinitely.

Georgina rushed from the room, and would have been out of the house if Selwyn had not just managed to beat her to the door by a close decision.

"Well!" She looked up at him defiantly.

"Well, Miss Carrier, what have you to say for yourself!"

"All right—how do you know that the golf instructor isn't a better man for her than your handsome hero in there?" she demanded; but there was no conviction in her voice.

"Because you can't mix things up like that. Your idea is all right, but it needs digesting. The trouble is that you have been spreading it among young persons who haven't the perspective to see it in its true relation."

"You mean to say that girls should not be taught to think?

"The first thing they should learn is that life is an art and art is form. If you go scrambling life indiscriminately, you get the same thing that you find in a Cubist painting—social dyspepsia—Georgina."

"Well." Her head drooped a little and the doctor put an arm around her shoulders.

"Will you marry me?"

Georgina was in no mood for laughter.

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ABOUT FASHIONS AND OTHER THINGS

By Various Hands

A very practical little lady of my acquaintance once said that one ought to prepare all one's winter clothes in July, and get ready the cotton frocks and tennis skirts about Christmas-time! There is a great deal to be said for the idea, but, on the other hand, things are apt to be just a little out of date if kept quite so long in the recesses of one's cupboard, and to the woman who dresses her mind and not so much her body, this would never do at all—for who knows what one's mind will be feeling like six months hence? No true woman surely! "Souvent femme varie," and why not? Surely this is one of her chief allurements: therefore the foresight of taking time so very much by the forelock in matters sartorial cannot be entirely successful, though to look just a couple of months ahead is wisdom.

Now is the time to renovate the fur coats and collars that do such yeoman service for quite half the year in this changeable climate of ours. Coats that are partly worn out can be cut up and made into the large cape-like collars that promise to be very popular. They are certainly attractive. Wide and deep at the back, they stand well away from the neck, and taper off into a narrow "V" in front, where they are tied with a large bow of silk ribbon. Made of several strands of skunk they are very effective, but worn with the newest coat and skirt they have a curiously top-heavy appearance. This is not displeasing, however. A slim and graceful prophetess of the autumn attractions was seen wearing one last week over a very charming coat and skirt that was undoubtedly the latest note from Paris, where even big Bertha cannot prevent the Parisiennes from looking as attractive as ever. Madame must be clothed, and she continues to manipulate her very curtailed resources with as much cleverness and "chic" as ever—a towel here, a button there, and hé presto—the magic is achieved! She is nothing if not economical, and this particular costume was cut out of the very smallest amount of material possible. The coat was not very long but very straight. It did not even meet across the front, but was held together with a wide strap giving a short-waisted appearance, and showing a jumper blouse of white cotton voile ornamented with wide pleated frills of the same. The skirt was distinctly skimpy and inclined to be short in spite of all we have heard to the contrary. This was undoubtedly for practical reasons, as it is not easy to walk with any degree of comfort in a narrow skirt that is at all long. It was in no wise a "hobble," but just wide enough for comfort and narrow enough for economy.

Trimmings, like everything else that is at all extravagant, are at a discount. We are dispensing with every little luxury possible, and plain tucks and little frills of self material are gaining in popularity every day. Never were frocks so easily run up at home, and never have they been more becoming. A charming navy serge for the early Autumn was made on the lines of a chemise frock, with a series of large tucks about two and a half inches in depth. In all there were about five: one a little above the waistline, the rest at equal distances on the skirt, which got narrower towards the hem, giving rather a barrel-like effect. It was held in loosely at the waist by a belt of green string tatting, about two inches wide, finishing with a large tassel, weighted with green wooden beads, in the centre front. The square *décolletage* was also outlined with this green string tatting, and each corner was finished with a smaller tassel. The sleeves were nearly to the wrist and had no cuff, but were also arranged with a series of wide tucks.

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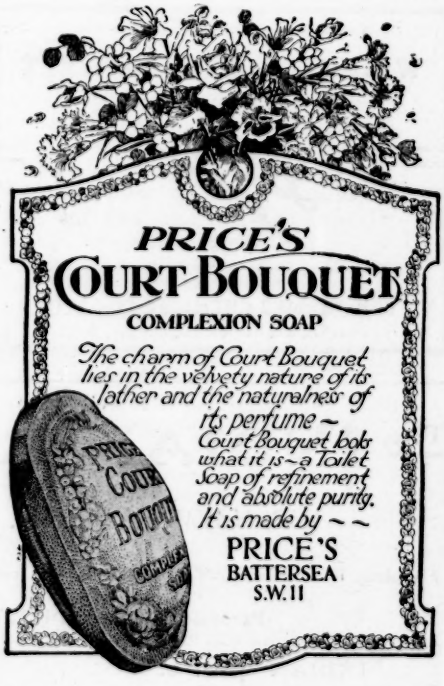
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